# THAT THE MINISTRY BE NOT BLAMED

John A. Hutton

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LECTURES TO DIVINITY STUDENTS IN ABERDEEN, EDINBURGH, AND GLASGOW IN THE SPRING OF 1921

BY THE REV.
JOHN A. HUTTON, D.D.

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TO THE

REV. J. H. LECKIE, D.D.

WHO IN OUR YOUTH

INTRODUCED ME TO

'BROWNING'

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Τὴν μέν τοι κακότητα καὶ ἱλαδὸν ἔστιν ἑλέσθαι
ῥηϊδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει·
τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἱδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν
ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτὴν
καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὴν δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται
ῥηϊδίη δὴ ἔπειτα πέλει, χαλεπή περ ἐοῦσα.

'Badness can be got easily and in shoals: the road to her is smooth, and she lives very near us. But between us and Goodness the gods have placed the sweat of our brows: long and steep is the path that leads to her, and it is rough at the first; but when a man has reached the top, then indeed she is easy, though otherwise hard to reach.'

HESIOD.

# LECTURE I

# I

I COULD spend a good deal of time attempting to find reasons why I should have had this task or honour imposed upon me, and in deprecating the wisdom of the appointment. I have not the slightest doubt that, in the last resort, there were on the consulting committee some friends of my own. We shall leave it at that.

There is one qualification to which I can lay claim. It is that I am not what is called 'a born preacher.' I say that is an advantage for one who is assuming this present task. A man who does anything really well naturally, whether it be preaching or playing golf, is perhaps the last man to be consulted

on the difficulties which they feel who are struggling with the art. Such a man has had no experience of our heart-breaking failures. With the best will in the world he is likely to lack sympathy and insight. And so it happens that those whom we call 'born preachers' are rarely great preachers or even good preachers. They are apt to break down early, having presumed upon their gift.

I am supposing that the idea in the minds of those who invited me was simply that it could not but be worth while for men like yourselves, who are looking forward to a life of preaching, to hear what one had to say who is under no delusions as to his own gifts, but who, as the result of one thing and another, is himself either a preacher or nothing. Certain members of that consulting committee, too, may have been aware that life has led me up and down

to minister statedly to truly various congregations: groups of people, that is to say, of greatly differing circumstance and immediate outlook; and that for the last fifteen years of my life I have been called upon, and have responded never entirely with ease, to confront large gatherings up and down the world, where one has no support from traditional and customary things, but must fall back upon the truth of his own soul.

From the day, some six months ago, when I accepted this appointment, the business has been in my mind persistently. I began by reading the books in my own library—about a dozen of them—on preaching, each one so admirable that there seemed no reason why I should not choose one at hazard, bring it under my arm, and read passages

out of it to you, the only personal contribution necessary being an exclamation of approval now and then. Not content with books which I had read for my own edification, I procured more recent ones, all of them equally admirable, until I perceived that if I were to say anything of my own at all, I should have rigorously to avoid reading further.

As I never read any book without taking notes—and that, by the way, is my first exhortation to you who are to be students and ministers—by the time I had worked through these volumes I had amassed a pile of observations, quotations from the books, criticisms and reflections of my own, and so forth. At the same time—and this is my second exhortation to you who are to be students and preachers—I am always making notes in any case, notes of the behaviour of my own mind. For there

is a moment, well known to any one who is aware of himself, when a matter on which one has brooded for a time suddenly stands out in a new light, when a knot becomes unravelled, and after some pressure there is the relief of a solution. I always pin myself down on paper at such points. Perhaps it is those points alone that light us through this world. And so, parallel with the volume of notes from books, with one's own approvals and disapprovals, there has grown up another more intimate and personal *dossier*, representing my subconscious mind on the whole matter of a preacher's calling and opportunity and equipment and so forth, as that subconscious mind leaps in moments to visibility and expression. Whereupon I have done what I do in my own practical work, and what I should recommend you to do. I have

set aside entirely that mass of remoter preparation, and have placed before me what represents my own prejudice and experience—the thing, in fact, which I myself have to say.

After hesitating for a time over a more formal and ponderous way of dealing with the subject, I have given my own mind great ease and happiness by deciding to call this, which I am launching out upon, not a set of Lectures on Preaching, but simply 'Some talks to preachers on one field and aspect of their life's work.' I find, too, that it was this precisely which was in the mind of the founder of this lectureship. I have only an indistinct acquaintance with the terms of the Foundation, but I know that it was Mr. Warrack's intention that a man speaking on this Foundation should devote himself more

or less to the *technique* of preaching. On a narrow interpretation of that word I should of course have refused to take anything to do with it. I have no 'tips' for preaching. If I had I should think it my first duty to forget them. In secular matters we hold a man to be in a perilous condition who is living by his wits; but when a preacher begins to live by his wits it is all over with him, and the sooner the better. But there is technique and technique. There is a laborious and most demanding technique which a lover of his work will always be ready to hear about and to practise. But this technique is moral to the very core. It is a travail of the soul, a lonely fidelity to an ideal which gives to the artist in any medium of expression his truth and authenticity.

I remember spending some hours in Venice over volume after volume of

pencil drawings and sketches, the work of Leonardo da Vinci. It made one ashamed; and after shame had done its good work—for the Stoics were not far wrong who declared that shame is the basis of all the virtues; we might say that shame is the occasion of all the graces—after shame had done its good work it was an immense encouragement to turn over page after page of that faithful and obscure preparation by a man of genius for his world-task. We are familiar all of us with Da Vinci's 'Last Supper,' and with the Face of our Lord in the centre. We know the story of how all the other faces were painted in that fresco, and the place left vacant for the countenance of the Son of God. We know that Da Vinci delayed and delayed until the authentic fire should burn. What we do not know, what I for my own part did not know until

that day in Venice when I handled those records of his unsuspected toil, was, that probably for years Da Vinci had laboured at that Face, obedient to the heavenly vision of his own ceaseless dissatisfaction, until, having with infinite patience laid the wood upon the altar and prepared the sacrifice, God one day sent the flame.

It was the opinion of the founder of this lectureship that sermons might be shorter. Indeed I rather suspect it was part of the proposal that we who occupy this place might drop you a hint to that effect. What I am sure the good man really means is that preaching should not be tedious. For time is an illusion. According to Bergson, as you students know, there is no such thing as time; there is only duration, that is, the sense of time. Now, when we have a painful

sense of time we call it tedium. If tedium can be charged against a man it is a fair charge. This irritating sense, however, of the slow passing of time, which a man may be aware of as he listens to a sermon, may proceed with equal likelihood from some defect in the hearer. It takes two to make a bargain, and one as well as the other may fail. And so perhaps opportunity should be taken from time to time to remind a congregation that they have a good deal to do with the length of sermons: that it is their interest or want of interest that makes a sermon short or long. Scotland, for example, during the last two hundred years has had few great preachers, hardly any. In my own view, in more recent days, excluding of course any reference to preachers who are still alive, there are only one or two whose sermons have at

least a pinch of the salt of immortality. Apart from the sermons of John Ker, and Leckie of Ibrox, and more recently A. B. Davidson, I do not know that there are any volumes of Scots sermons which I care nowadays to read. There is a temporariness and a stridency about most of them which, like the overtones of brass instruments, has shortened their reach.

And yet there has been a great preaching tradition in Scotland. The explanation can only be what we know indeed it was: the people of Scotland made the work of their preachers great by the greatness of their own desire. They clothed the occasion with entreaty towards God and with power.

Were I addressing a congregation on the contribution which was due from them to the interestingness and desirableness of the sermon, I should urge that

point. I should tell them what is most true, that even for their own comfort the best way to get through a sermon undoubtedly is to listen to it. If you only listen NOW AND THEN to what a man is saying, it does not matter what he is saying, it will sound tedious. If you allow your mind to wander, as you easily may, you will put the preacher to a great disadvantage. Sitting there in your pew—and, when one comes to think of it, the convention even of sitting while something is being said the only object of which is to urge men to moral action works against the efficacy of preaching—sitting there in your pew you may, all unbeknown to any other, go away your holidays. You may spend a week, or a fortnight, at the coast or in the country; whereupon some change in the preacher's voice, or some sudden silence, may recall you to your

bodily circumstances. You find the preacher still speaking and the whole thing seems unduly prolonged, because, of course, it includes that fortnight of yours at the coast or country. But the real exposition of that situation is not that the preacher has been long, but that you are frivolous, or perhaps even had dropped off to sleep. For in an instant of time, neurologists tell us, we can seem to ourselves when we are dreaming to have taken part in affairs which require the lapse of days or even years.

Still, discounting all that, there is fairness in what Spurgeon is alleged to have said to a young preacher who was complaining of the lethargy of his people, namely, that the preacher was there to keep them awake.

Now that we have raised this point, we might dwell upon it for a little while.

And it was one of the things that I promised myself as a compensation for the interruption of my own work which these lectures involved, that I myself should get some pleasure out of them, the pleasure of saying to myself, and putting down in so many words, ideas that have long hung about my mind.

About six months ago, in North Carolina in the United States, I heard a great master of preaching talk of this very matter of tediousness in preaching, a man of extraordinary power and of irresistible humour. It was at a conference of preachers and Christian teachers. He laid down the rule, and illustrated it with endless variety, that everything that suggested the passing of time should be rigorously avoided. There should be no clock in the church. The preacher should never consult his watch. He should never say 'firstly,'

and 'secondly,' and so forth. Never should he say, 'and now, one word more,' or 'allow me in closing.' Never a word to suggest that he is taking advantage of them, that he is straining their patience, and so feels that he must in his conventional way rather apologise. He should himself believe, and should give his hearers the impression that there is nothing else in the world comparable in importance to the occasion, that the entire sense of time should be expelled by the sense of some more intimate urgency. He interrupted himself, I remember, and gave an illustration of how intolerable time is once your attention is drawn to its passing. Going across to a piano which was on the platform, he said: 'Now, I am going to strike a note. I shall have my watch in my hand, and after a certain interval I shall strike another

note or the same note over again. I shall allow you to guess the length of that interval.' By this time, of course, some two thousand of us were keyed up to be aware of nothing else but time. He struck a note, gazed at his watch, and then, after what seemed to us literally an age in which the solar system might have cooled, he struck another note. I should certainly have said, strictly speaking, that a minute had passed, or a minute and a half. As a matter of fact, seven seconds had passed. But those seven seconds, I speak for myself, had absolutely exhausted us.

But to speak of other considerations affecting our sense of time and interest, considerations which may sound graver and more serious but which are really not so. It may very well be that in these days of ours there is a deepening

difference in outlook upon life on the part of men like yourselves, whose interests necessarily are amongst books and philosophies and the subtleties for good and evil of the human soul, and the average man of business and affairs. It is not a difference in intellectual range, but rather in outlook, and in final interest. Something of the kind is perhaps inevitable as a consequence of the specialisation of our time. Finely appreciated, it is a difference which a good man in the pulpit can turn to most excellent account. It is a fine thing for a man in the ministry to feel that whilst his people are busy day in and day out, as they ought to be, at their work, adding to the commodities and amenities of life on the secular plane, he is equally busy, living a truly substitutionary life, facing things which, because they come home powerfully

to himself, he knows must be, though more obscurely, coming home to every human heart. And so on a Sunday every good minister of the Word of God should appear before his people, and this no matter what may be his intellectual range or limitation, with a soul aware of the unseen and happy in the knowledge of it. It is this contrast in background between the necessary work of the world and the experience of a thinking and sensitive man, which, more than anything else that I can name, gives freshness and desirableness to his subject. It is this, in part at least, which constitutes the truth and appropriateness of the metaphor of the Shepherd and the sheep, as applied to a pastor of souls and his people.

There is nothing more stimulating to a man's mind who is on honourable and affectionate terms with his people

than the sense which he may very well have that he is contributing week by week to their total force and to the direction of their spirits, assisting them to bear up against life, to resist its various threatenings in the name of a great world of the unseen with which he, as a scholar and a believing man, is obviously in daily and happy contact.

But there are dangers threatening any man in the ministry who, aware as he may well be of this necessary difference in background between a man whose very vocation and business in the world it is to deal with the things of the soul, and people a very large part of whose business is necessarily with material things. I say there are obvious dangers besetting any man who is aware of this difference and who, in the phrase of Epictetus, takes hold of it by the wrong handle.

For one thing, a man may be so afraid of speaking over his people's heads that he goes to the other extreme and speaks down amongst their feet. Knowing as he does the daily interest and occupations of his people, he may fall into the mistake of supposing that they would like him to deal, if not with their daily interests and affairs, at least with matters not too remote from these. In that I believe he is altogether at fault. If what a man is saying is indeed his own, if it has come to him with the desire for their good, if the one reason he wants to make it known is that it is something which has come to his own rescue and augments for himself the force of God within his soul, he will be understood by even simple souls. What makes all high-sounding talk about life seem unreal is that it does not come fresh and authentic from a man's own

spirit. The man himself does not seem to have a firm-enough grip of what he is saying. He uses words easily which, if he were feeling at the moment what he is saying, he could use only with difficulty and with awe.

Another danger, which perhaps one should apologise for referring to, is the danger of professionalism and conceit. For this disease the patient must minister to himself.

That is a quaint and helpful suggestion of S. James, that now and then we should take a look at ourselves in a mirror.

I remember a conversation I had once upon a time with one of my members, a plain man in the country, a slater to trade: as a matter of fact he was really a man of genius; a man who, incidentally, spent his Fair Holidays walking from Dundee to the Moor of

Rannoch, and spending the whole of a summer night on the top of Schiehallion by the way. I remember having a conversation with this man one Monday, returning to my own parish from an absence. He had taken the opportunity of my absence to attend another church, where a rather popular man was ministering for the day. I myself was young at the time and asked him, what perhaps I should not have asked him—namely, how he had enjoyed the service. He replied, 'Moderately.' On my expressing astonishment, he added: 'Well, you see, Mr. Hutton, I 'll just tell you how he began his sermon. He lifted himself up and looked round about the congregation, and opened his mouth and said: "In that immortal novel of Cervantes, *Don Quihoté*, or, as I suppose you call it, *Don Quixote*——" I was done with him

then. I never listened to another word he said.'

But I must not forget that I am dealing at the moment with possible reasons or causes for the alleged dullness and tediousness of sermons, which some would seek to remedy by the simple process of making them shorter. There is another source to which I may allude.

Sometimes what appears to hearers to be the dullness and length of a sermon arises from the fact that the preacher is, so to speak, answering questions which no one is putting. I think, in our own day, a great deal of the futility of preaching has precisely this source. Now there is a sense in which you cannot answer a question profitably until it has been asked. The putting of the question, certainly in ultimate

matters, is itself part of the answer, and the chief part. And so it has always been easy to preach in great times, when there was some urgent necessity moving the minds of men. How easy, for example, as some of us can recall, how easy it was to preach when the Germans were marching on Paris, or when the Zeppelins were over Edinburgh.

When I say that the dreariness and lack of interest which are alleged against sermons may have this source—that we ministers to-day are answering questions which men are not really asking, and are offering solutions for problems which as a matter of fact never occurred to them until we mentioned them—when I say this I do not mean to suggest that we should be dealing in our regular ministry with the passing interests of the day, or with such

questions and moods as are apt to arise in idle or it may even be malicious minds.

It may be a sign that I am getting on in years, but for myself I deprecate the turning of the sermon into an occasion for discussion. Such a practice, were it to become general, would be apt to encourage an idea which, entering into the Church as she passed through the zone of Greek sophistry and rhetoric, has wrought almost nothing but mischief—the idea, namely, that Christianity is something to be clever about, or subtle, or even wise, rather than something to act upon. Once we launched upon the practice of inviting our hearers to say in effect what they thought of our presentation of truth—and I could give you some merry examples of the practice from Dio Chrysostum—we should find

ourselves on a slope down into mere curiosity and words where the further we went the wilder would be the pace.

For if it came to be understood that in our preaching we should engage pretty regularly in the discussion of passing things, and that, on our concluding, opportunity would be given, would indeed be thrust upon our hearers, for criticism and debate, the next stage it seems to me would be that we should announce beforehand the matter on which we proposed to speak, so that our hearers might come prepared. This indeed might somewhat mitigate the evil. Still on the whole, and speaking for myself, it would be an evil. There is always a reason for any habit which has survived for a few centuries, and for any veto or restraint which men, who like ourselves have always loved liberty, have nevertheless accepted. And we

may be sure that the habit and circumstances of Christian preaching which make it the testimony of one man and ordain that such testimony shall be received in silence, had some very good reasons for themselves, reasons which would leap to every good man's mind if the practice were seriously or generally departed from. For the fact is, as I have said, it was at one time the practice in the Christian Church that the hearers should signify what they thought of the preacher even as he was speaking and when he had finished: and things in consequence happened so dangerous both to preachers and to congregations that the protest and condemnation of the practice were sustained.

Speaking for myself—and there will be, I can foresee, no value whatever in these conversations unless they are in-

timate and almost purely personal—speaking for myself, the only time when I want to hear what people think of what I have been saying is when I myself know very well that I have been saying nothing that is vital or necessary. When, on the other hand, I have been having what my Methodist friends call a good time, when things have come to me so inevitable and true that they were not my own, I forbid any man to speak to me there and then of my message. For at such times I have brought those who hear me face to face with God, with that very aspect of God with which they know they have to do, and I am not going to be a party to their escaping from their own seriousness by raising a dust in their minds.

* * * *

When I say that the weariness and sense of the slow passing of time which

is charged to preaching may have its reason here—that the pulpit is apt to waste energy and fire on questions about which people in our particular day are not concerned—I am not meaning that forthwith and in order to recover a certain appearance of interest we should take up the catchwords of the day. What I mean is that we should deal with the questions that lie in wait for all men, questions which most men all the time with varying degrees of consciousness are seeking to evade.

I see no future for preaching unless it deals with obviously necessary things, giving light and motive to human beings face to face with the tragedy which life is if man be but a natural creature. If the substance of our preaching is not something which is necessary, then preaching and Christianity with it is but an irrelevance and a nuisance. If

its object be but to inform men, or to entertain them, men will go elsewhere. I shall not trouble to wait upon your ministry with any anxious regularity, and my children after me will not trouble you with their presence at all, if you are merely going to tell me from your exalted place what you happen to think of this and that. 'This' and 'that' may be important enough matters to me. They may indeed be so important that I shall seek guidance upon them elsewhere.

But there are matters on which I believe there will always be a saving portion of your fellow-men prepared to hear a good man speak. For life as it deals with us first and last is a tragic business, face to face with which men surely will for ever be found ready for a candid fellowship. For life and death are the great preachers; it is our

function who preach to confront the darkness of them with a light, and to give the answer of our Faith to their vile insinuation. That surely is a function which will survive. The more disheartening the world of men, the greater will be the need for it; so that in times like this in which we live, which are very dark and little light in them, there is something invincible within us of the Christian Church which persuades us that, because of the very desperateness of things, a movement has even now begun from the side of God of which it may be you will be the happy exponents and interpreters.

Meanwhile there is only one thing of which a youth setting out upon the Christian ministry needs to be personally and lyrically confident: it is that the work to which he is putting his hand is necessary for that human

welfare which is one aspect of the Glory of God. What tires a man in the ministry and makes him in secret sad is the feeling which comes over him—let loose often by some trivial occasion—that his work is not worth while: that it is not a man's full work, that it has nothing of the urgency and obvious value of work done with the hands; of less value maybe than the work of a politician or a publicist.

Well now, if there is a man whose reasoned view that is, he should not go further. For I cannot conceive a more unhappy life than the life of a Christian minister who has ceased to believe that his work is the supreme service he can render—having the faculties and aptitudes, and preferences, and the personal faith which God has given him.

But surely, when, as is the case with

us to-day, the world of the human soul is rocking, not so much with the tempest of outward events, grave as these are, but because of its own lightness and shallowness and the absence from it of that weight and depth and resiliency which come of a sense of God—surely it is no time for any sensitive man who knows history, and who knows his own soul, to hesitate on the threshold of this ancient career.

Probably never in the history of man was the great and final question about life at stake as it is to-day.

All our questions fall back upon deeper questions, and these on deeper still, until they pause before the Great and Awful question as to what this life of ours may mean. Are we human beings irrelevant to this vast system which was our cradle and becomes our grave ? Or is there a blessed hypothesis

which thinking, feeling men can honourably hold—a hypothesis which without robbing life of its mystery and awe ends for us its aching ambiguity. May we speak to men of God ?

There is one solving word for this universe : it is God. There is one solving word for God : it is Christ.

* * * *

I am sorry for you men that you have no great poet, as we had, to set your Christian blood leaping, disposing you almost to dance before the Lord. We had Browning : for whom be all thanks to God for ever and ever. And Browning spent his whole life and wrote seventeen volumes to this and no other effect :

'While I see day succeed the deepest night—
How can I speak but as I know ?—my speech
Must be, throughout the darkness, "It will end :
The light that did burn, will burn !" '

# LECTURE II

## II

THE point on which I closed in the preceding lecture was, that preaching, in order to survive, must deal with and minister to some abiding necessity of the soul. That necessity, simply because it belongs to the soul, will always be in danger of being blurred or concealed, always in danger, therefore, of being neglected, and for short periods even denied; and it will be always a large part of the task of preaching to recover to men's minds the sense of the urgency of the matters with which we deal. But, to say it again, preaching must deal with things of such a kind that if they should be disparaged by one generation and repudiated by the generation which

succeeds, human life would lose the basis which, under the Christian discipline, it presently rests upon, and the hope which, entering the human heart with Christ, has been its steadying prospect through centuries.

We speak of the Church of the Living God. It has become the basis of our thinking that we live and move and have our being in God. Such phrases and ideas and beliefs mean that the Church is a living organism which, like every other living organism, may change its aspect in order to defend and to express its very essence. It may very well be that the great question, the great problem, the great misgiving with which Christianity deals, is always in the final resort the same. But circumstances change; the point of danger moves from one place to another, and Christianity, which is out to defend the value and

sanity of life, has to move its forces according to the conscious or unconscious strategy of circumstance.

There may be long stretches of time when, so far as we see, nothing very remarkable is taking place in the world. Or, if great things are taking place, there are stretches of time when for one reason and another we are not aware of them. These flat and tame times may come after a period of great agitation; for what is true of the individual soul is true of larger aggregates of mankind: we can endure strain and anguish only up to a certain point.

But there is something in man which, after a time, compels him once again to strike his tents. The very circumstances in which he thought to settle down in quietness, as though he were a mere animal, begin to fester and to trouble him; or the posture of mind

which he had assumed after the last upheaval begins to lose its fitness, and the security which that posture of mind seemed to offer to him against life and death and his own thoughts about one and the other and about himself begins to wear through, disclosing to him horrid depths. But whatever be the reason, and the reason is something which is there, in man and in life, a time comes when man becomes restless, angry, frivolous, afraid, ready for anything. And the Christian Church must accompany man, must hold on to him, must not give him up, must sing to him and keep singing the Lord's Song in those strange lands.

To speak more definitely, ours is a living world, and the problem of one age or generation or century is never precisely the problem of any immediately

preceding time. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, the matter on which the Reformed Church was called upon to protest, and, having the Bible in its hand, to protest in the name of God, was the question of the personal right of access to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So far as preaching is concerned that was a great time; for a great time is a time when there is only one thing to say, and the one thing to say at that time was that, the entire Bible being witness, a man might speak in the bush with God. For two hundred years the Reformed Church lived on the happiness and rhetoric of that great idea. It is no wonder that the Bible was exalted at such a period. We must never forget indeed what precisely it was for the sake of which the Reformers made their great assertions concerning the written Word. I have

never for myself believed that they were greatly concerned at the outset for its literal inerrancy. Perhaps they were compelled to that by the enormous prestige of the authority of the Church on the other side. But I think at the outset, and in the light of Calvin and Luther's attitude one seems to find encouragement for the view, that by their exaltation of the Bible the Reformers meant to compel the Roman Church to choose between two absolutely exclusive alternatives. If Rome was right in her claim to the power of the Keys, and that no one should have frank fellowship with God except on certain ecclesiastical terms, then the God, whose decree that was alleged to be, was something different from the God of the Bible. As for themselves, the God of the Bible was their God; and the Bible, which had

described the behaviour of God through centuries and centuries, was the foundation and support of their plea.

But that was the live matter with which preaching for two hundred years dealt. As we shall see later on, that great controversy has still its bearings for us to-day. It may be true that we have to arrive at the question which the first Reformers sought to solve for themselves, as S. Paul in the beginning had to solve it for himself (it may be that we arrive at that question to-day), urged by forces which can be stated only in contemporary speech. But, on the surface, THAT—speaking in general terms—is not where the shoe pinches in our case.

It seems to myself that the next great crisis in the Christian Church occurred almost in our own day, in the

middle of the nineteenth century. I know very well that there is no absolutely new beginning in the history of ideas, and that any crisis has had a long and secret preparation. I know, too, that events have power to shake and disquiet the human soul simply because there is within the soul of man at every stage of his experience a capacity for uneasiness and fear. But there is no doubt that scientific inquiry—in short, the labour of the human mind—was able about the middle of the nineteenth century to announce results in the region of knowledge, results which in substance have been verified, which had the effect in sensitive minds of letting loose, in certain quarters a wave of consternation, and in other quarters a mood of disillusionment and sadness. A great deal of the best preaching in the latter half of the nineteenth century was

preaching in defence of the human soul against the insinuations and innuendoes of the new knowledge. For suddenly the world had become bigger, far too big; and the human soul was in danger of feeling aghast, alone in its ridiculous little boat on such an immeasurable sea.

Into that age God poured, for our race at least, a wealth of poetry as rich as in the Elizabethan period, and poetry much more serious, more gravely concerned to safeguard the right of man to keep up his head. Clough and Arnold made us aware of the pathos of man in his new surroundings; and that very pathos was the soil on which a new faith began to spring. In Tennyson and Browning one can mark a further stage in the recovery of the human soul; until in our own day the Pragmatists and the Idealists alike have

established the authority of instinct and intuition and reason and will, all culminating, if a man will have it so, in faith in God face to face with a universe which at one time seemed justified in overwhelming him.

In the nineteenth century, that is to say, the very function of the Church was to comfort the human soul in its shudder at the magnitude of things; to declare once again that delicate and precious as the faculty might be by which a man laid hold on God, the delicacy of the faculty was no disparagement of its authenticity and truth. That just as it is a delicate thread of tissue like the optic nerve, by which alone a man is confident that what he sees about him is actually there—for that delicate nerve is not a thing by itself, but a thing related to a man's entire personality, the long result of an inconceivable process of adjust-

ment, out of which it has survived and is now established—just so the faculty by which man is aware of God, and lies open to Divine intrusions, is a faculty by all the tokens ineradicable in man and of his very essence.

Now, although you who are before me and your contemporaries will always be called upon from time to time, in fidelity to the recurring moods of your own mind, to defend the human soul from discomfiture and collapse face to face with an apparently heedless universe, nevertheless, on the whole, once again it is not here that in this actual moment of time the shoe pinches. The matter in debate is in a sense something still more thoroughgoing. If in the nineteenth century good men speaking in the Name of God, whether they were poets or preachers, felt that their one task was to compose the human

soul shuddering as it was at the magnitude of things : in the twentieth century, in this very hour of time, the function of good men who speak in the Name of God is to declare that faith in God is not a possibility merely, but an absolute and immediate necessity; not that man *may* have fellowship with God, but that he *must* have fellowship with God or cease to be himself. In a word, the twentieth century seems to me to have as its immediate task that man must put Christ on the throne, or perish.

And now, if in what remains to-day I can make good this necessity, this appropriateness of the word *must* in the description of the task to which you are called, I shall have done everything that an honourable mind requires in order to make it eager and happy. What a man must do, he will wish to do,

he will thank God for the opportunity of doing.

Burke declared that he did not know how to draw up an indictment against an entire nation: to charge the whole western world with some prevalent mood is a still more hazardous proceeding. For the truth about man is never altogether on the surface. Even while things on the surface are breaking forth like a tree in leaves, already the wave of vitality which produced such foliage is failing at its source. It is most true of man that when a thing is out, it is over, it has already passed the zenith of its power. Something else, and usually it is something different and even contrary, is already on the way. And so, we have the saying that what is all the fashion never lasts; for the fact is what is all the fashion is some-

thing which has already expressed itself, that is to say, has now exhausted itself. Still there are in the present complicated temper of the world, forces, moods, catchwords, reactions which may endure for a time before they have reached their apogee, on attaining to which, if history is a light upon our human path, the soul of man will come home again sobered and almost too ready to fall back upon an earlier wisdom.

And now let me try to make clear to my own mind in your hearing some of those moods and more or less total attitudes to life which, not amongst the thoughtful only who exercise their minds about the meaning of life, but as a general and accepted disposition, prevail in our time and give us our immediate task.

In my own view, one of the most

elusive, as it is one of the most widespread, attitudes of men in our day towards life is the refusal to think seriously about it. We do not say with the Russians of the old régime, *nitchevo*, and shrug our shoulders : but we have by many a token the very mood. The precise thing which is in my mind at the moment is the general acceptance of the more genial side of the Christian revelation, and the immovable and for the most part the very good-natured and even chaffing refusal to think at all of those peremptory and solemn facts of the soul, and of those disquieting and formidable possibilities, the honourable terror of which, as I hold, Christ came from God to appease.

Here is what I mean. Take any great doctrine of the Christian Faith—and if any man tells me that Christianity has nothing to do with doctrine, I can

only control myself lest in defending the basis of faith I do violence to its grace. Or I shall say to such a man, 'Will you come to me ten years hence or twenty years hence, when you have had children, and they have grown up, and you have lost one of them; or when you yourself have failed, and still do not want to die of shame—in fact, when you have lived, will you come back to me then, and tell me how you manage to go on living without some reasoned understanding of this life of ours and the part which, according to Christ, God takes in it.'

But take any great doctrine of the Christian faith. Take the doctrine of 'forgiveness.' For a long time now, doing what we honestly supposed was our very business, we have been declaring the love of God towards man in the forgiveness of sins. But we have

allowed ourselves to be misunderstood as meaning that forgiveness is absolutely free and unconditional. We have taken deep words of Scripture out of their context and have announced to the world the reckless compassion of God. Of course, WE understand what we mean; and we have in our minds the qualifying facts and principles, and that outcome of personal consecration without which surely God's forgiveness is not ratified in any human soul.

But those who hear us casually or those who hear the rumour of these things from the pavement simply take what they want and leave the rest. 'God forgives our sins: good! Why, that may mean that God does not think so seriously about our sins! In fact, it may mean that there is nothing in sin; that a man is a man'—meaning,

as one always does when one says that, that he is not. And so our very announcement of the love of God in this matter of the forgiveness of sin, has had the effect over whole tracts of human society, of removing from men's minds their own instinctive uneasiness on moral matters. The world would seem to have taken from the Christian Gospel of forgiveness what the Judaisers declared the world of their day, and the Church too, had taken, and what S. James declared the world and the Church were at least apt to take from S. Paul's exposition of the Gospel. In a slack and jaunty way they have taken up the position that God does not take sin seriously. And so, unless we do something and that immediately to put the world and the Church right on that matter, we shall find that our very keenness to announce the forgiveness

of God is ministering to moral indolence and hardness of heart. We shall be helping men to do that most disastrous thing, to lose dishonourably their own moral uneasiness, and to turn the very edge of the sword of the spirit.

Now, how are we to get back the truth about even such a doctrine as that? For I take it that it is the very nature of truth that it hurts you until you yield to it; it is certainly the very nature of truth to make a demand upon you, and at a certain stage any demand is inconvenient. I am not forgetting some words attributed to Sir Oliver Lodge some time ago, that to-day men are not worrying about their sins. I cannot recall precisely what Sir Oliver Lodge meant to convey by saying a thing like that. If he meant to say that therefore men were right, Sir Oliver Lodge has given us another illustration

of the wisdom of the saying about a cobbler keeping to his last. If he meant that it is an admirable trait of the human mind in these days and marks a moral advance, I cannot imagine a piece of more concentrated folly. For on any hypothesis, what is a sin ? It is a failure. It is an infringement of some supposed law and order of things; and if we have been guilty of it we have been guilty of something of such a kind that if there were no beneficent influences at work on the other side, our solitary act would ruin the world.

Well, if a man has done a thing like that, it is nothing to be proud of but a thing to be ashamed of that he has forgotten about it. But the fact is that this saying, about men to-day not worrying about their sins, is not true. It may be true that an enormous

number of men are not worrying about their sins, but then an enormous number of men are not worrying about anything, and so we have this present horrid and nasty world. For things are what they are and the consequences will be what they will be, whether men are worrying about them or not. A great many people, for example, are not worrying about their debts; but if THEY are not worrying some other body has got to do the worrying, for the worrying has to be endured in a world that will misbehave.

Mr. Micawber, I remember, was a great man for not worrying; but I should have liked to hear the report—indeed we have the report—of his son, Charles Dickens, whose whole output of poignant and bitter sentiment has its basis in the unforgettable misery of a boyhood and youth which had come

to him as a doom through the moral carelessness of a Micawber.

Even if it were true that in these days men are not worrying about their sins, there would be all the graver reason surely for serious men worrying about their own sins and other people's sins. Christ died for our sins. The sin of man, that is to say, worried our Lord to death.

And that precisely is what we see happening beneath the surface and in all far-seeing and priestly minds in our day, in spite of all that we may say against the present intellectual frivolity. During the last thirty or forty years, the great literature of the world—and you must judge man in any age and all the time not by his poorest behaviour, but by his loftiest—the great literature of our time has been concerned with nothing else than this problem of the

forgiveness of sins. And God, I will believe, has so ordered things in order that we who are the exponents of His truth may have guidance given to us as to how to recover in the minds of men the poignant, tragic sense of our failure and its fruits. For it may very well be that in order to bring this whole matter home to the souls of men, we must adopt the phraseology which they understand, and meet them on a level which they acknowledge to be just.

When I say that the great literature of the world of the last forty years has been engaged with almost nothing else than the problem of sin and how to deal with it, I am thinking, of course, of the supreme literature of the soul in our day or in any day, the literature of Russia.

S. Paul stated the question in the terms: 'How can a man be just before God?' How, that is to say, can God

forgive sin? How is forgiveness possible even to God? If this world is moral, how can God deal with a thing so that it will be as though it had not been? I throw a stone into placid water, and immediately from a centre waves and ripples roll out on every side. Were it an infinite expanse of water, the ripples, I believe, would go on to infinity. How can God stop those ripples?

I do something wrong; it does violence to something in my own soul which is either right or there is nothing right. And since a sin is seldom a solitary and unrelated thing, the wrong I have done has hurt another life or other lives. From these the fruits of my deed infect a wider circle, and so on and on. How can God stop it? How can God stop the consequences outside of me which are now beyond my power to recall? And how, if I am disposed

to let my head droop with shame, how can God so deal with me that I can honourably lift up my head again? That is the question.

I hold that on the natural plane, on the plane of the human reason, there is no solution of it whatever. This brings me to the Russians. Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, Duimov—to name the more outstanding figures in that great, true, sad literature of the soul—are engaged, I repeat, with almost nothing else than this question. There, I say, is where they help us to deal with our age; for the question, that tragic question, waits for an answer at the bar of man's own conscience. They do not say, though in the last resort they mean precisely the same as Paul says when he raises his question, 'How can a man be just before God?' How, that is to say, can God forgive a man?

They rather ask the question, 'How can a man be just before himself? How can a man who has sinned forgive himself?' That question they ponder with a depth and subtlety which is absolutely beyond the power of the western mind to create, or even, in certain moments of it, to follow in imagination. For it is the doom of the Russian men of genius that they cannot lift up their eyes to the hills; they cannot look up and see the stars. It is their doom that *they* shall see the stars, not by looking away from this world, as is our happier spiritual fortune, but by looking into life and through life; so that the stars they see are not the stars that shine over our life in these northern latitudes of the spirit: they are the stars which they see through the earth, the stars of the Antipodes, planted not in an overarching dome,

uplifting the spirit of man, but embedded in the depth and abysm of things, finding like Christ the breast of God, only on the other side of the cry of dereliction on the Cross.

They see God not so much over life as through life; not composing life's agony, but struggling in the heart of that agony like a fellow-man. And what is their solution? Oh, there is a sense in which it is no solution except so far as *it is something of a solution to any question, that men have come at length to ponder that question deeply.* A serious and suppliant spirit is perhaps the only solution for life. For life may have no other purpose than this, to compel us to cry out and to find God, to sink down and down until we rest in Everlasting Arms.

As for Duimov: what he sees in the

modern world to-day is the human soul everywhere running away from Christ, running away from a haunting truth, the truth of its own impotence, and a certain fearful looking for judgment which is man's natural doom.

In Dostoievsky and in Tolstoy—to the former of whom it sometimes seems to me as though God had given too much, too much pain, too much insight—in these two the solution is partially the Christian solution, though the Christian solution is not shallower but deeper still, not less poignant but more poignant. 'If I have sinned'—so either of these men would say—'I have not sinned alone. And if my sin has caught in its toils another's life, then there is no future for me as a man except henceforward in absolute devotion to that life which I have injured or insulted. I must not lift up my head again. I

must go through life a broken man, until he or she absolves me whom by my wrongdoing I have hurt. And even from Christ I shall not take forgiveness unless on the terms that henceforward I belong body and soul to this one at whose word and entreaty I a sinful man agree to lift up my head.'

And further, these two would say, 'I know from my own experience on the other side that if any one has done me a wrong and comes to me asking forgiveness, I know that there is only one way in which I can forgive him if I have felt the wound of his deed towards me. It may not be easy. It may be hard. It may be like taking the flesh from my bones. It may be an agony, the agony of self-suppression. And even that will fail until I draw near to this historic figure of Jesus, who asked me in such a crisis of the soul to take His way.

But I know that if I am to forgive one who has wronged me, it can only be by allowing the arrows of his deed to sink into my soul until my soul bleeds, and heals in its own blood. And then only, when renunciation like a taper lights up my soul and I know the awful Peace of God—then only can I put out my hand and grasp his hand in forgiveness who has put himself for his conscience' sake at my mercy.'

Now, we must recover all that, and more, by some means. For it must never be that we ministers of Christ are found to be dealing in any age with life on a more shallow level than is occupied by the grave literature of man. It will be a shameful thing if, from behind the Communion table, we are talking about trivial or temporary things, when the Spirit of God is agitat-

ing men outside the Church to those lonely and awful depths. By all means it must be brought home to the minds of our hearers in these days that forgiveness of sins—a matter which they, largely with our encouragement, take so much for granted as the kind of natural way, so natural that it seems otiose and unnecessary to make much of it—that forgiveness is something which is not possible and is not accomplished, unless as the consequence of an agony in man and of an agony in God.

I have said more than once in what has immediately gone before, that we preachers have encouraged people, both in the Church and outside the Church, to adopt this careless view of one great doctrine of Christianity. We have put forgiveness at the wrong place. Forgiveness is God's response to a previous

sincerity of the soul. In other ways we have contributed to this careless, cold, and unfeeling attitude on a doctrine which, truly perceived, might once again let loose the spirit of adoration in the Christian Church. The one way by which we have evacuated this great doctrine of its blood and tears is by the very tone of familiarity and ease with which we even pronounce the words. We speak of these deep things too easily; and they are things—these deep things—of such a kind that when we speak of them easily it means that we do not know at the moment what we are speaking about. I have heard a man use the words, 'Christ died for me,' with a chatty, jaunty air which was a subtle form of blasphemy. It was obvious to any understanding man that at the moment he did not know what he was speaking about.

'My sin is ever before me,' so said the Psalmist, and so must we say one by one, not that I may be morbid over it, still less that I may seem to gloat over it in the hearing of others as though thereby I were doing God honour or were flattering myself. 'My sin is ever before me' in order that I may have ever before me the great mystery, the great faith, which is my only ground of self-respect and hearty moral action, that, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, forgiveness is not impossible.

It is a principle and steady support of all my own thinking about life, that every great emotion is rooted in its own opposite; that the mountain which lifts itself up to the sun has an equal mass beneath the surface and at the roots of things. Now, it is the terrible

penalty which we pay even for a fine experience that unless we take care we may lose the sense of its fineness. Who are they who can appreciate freedom and speak of it lyrically, but those who in fact or in imagination have felt the bitterness of bondage ? And they only, it may be, are competent to deliver that great message of forgiveness who do not permit themselves to forget the pit and the miry clay. It is this that makes each ministry a life of substitution ; and there is no ministry without this priestly basis. 'I protest,' to recall a saying of S. Paul, 'we die daily, nevertheless you live.' And what he means is surely something very simple, but something which is of the very essence of our calling, separating that calling from every other in the world.

Francis Thompson, God's gift of poetry to the hard-bestead preachers

of our day — Francis Thompson in a couplet offers a prayer which day by day a good man in the ministry would do well to make his own. Thompson prays

> 'that my tone be
> Fresh with dewy pain alway.'

Let me live near to my own deepest self, to that self of mine which touches so far as man may touch the very life of God. Let me remember my own failings and necessities and my tendency to despair. Let my soul sink down into these most baptismal waters, until, having touched reality, which is for us the Breast of God, I rise again dripping with happiness and power.

Robert Louis Stevenson prays somewhere that, if God ever catches him becoming casual and cocksure and futile, He might stab his soul into

reality and happiness by some brusque interruption.

I do not know a service which at this moment is so urgently needed within the Church which is our first field, and out in the world which we are here to affect through the Church—I know of no such clamant service as the disturbance and overthrow of that crust of familiarity and thoughtlessness under which the great truths concerning God and the soul of man, with which it is our very function to comfort the mind of man, lie at this moment almost dead. It is the very function of philosophy, not to compose and confirm man in those final attitudes towards life into which he is always drifting, but to upset his superficial confidence, and to disturb him in certain postures of the soul which, even if they were in the first

instances spiritual achievements, have now become familiar to him, and half-sensual satisfactions. And we have the strong saying which we must not seek to evade—'I will overturn and overturn and overturn until He come whose right it is'—which saying seems to involve that it is the function of our Religion to disturb man in every condition and posture of the soul in which, having fled thither for refuge and found a temporary security, he proposes to take up his permanent abode—forgetting that, because he is what he is, and that by God's ordinance, man is a dweller in tents, that is to say, he must move on.

'With me, belief means
Perpetual unbelief kept quiet,
Like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.'

# LECTURE III

## III

THE point which I was trying to make in my last lecture, more definitely towards the close, was that we are suffering to-day in every region of our life from a casual and unthoughtful acquiescence in great words and traditional institutions, notably in our attitude towards the fabric and system of Christian beliefs and customs. And one service which I declared was urgently demanded at the moment is, in a sense to upset this idle equanimity even were we thereby to leave great numbers of people sprawling and running about in consternation like insects disturbed by light. It is a profound observation of Shestov's that 'doubt becomes a

continuous creative force, inspiring the very essence of our life.' It is this above everything else which in my view accounts for the dullness and weariness alleged against preaching. And without doubt we preachers are largely responsible. We encourage those feelings of dullness and indolence of mind by allowing people both in the Church and out in the world to suppose that this whole universe has now been explored and comfortably interpreted, all its tragic and seething elements having now been put under thoroughly respectable management. In fact we have encouraged in our people (and outsiders have taken the hint) a comfortable feeling about life and about themselves. In short, that on the colossal scale 'the thing's done,' and that nowadays preaching consists in telling the story of the achievement, and worship con-

sists in listening to the story respectfully. Now if that is all, it can never be anything but a dull performance. We speak of a dead 'certainty.' And 'certainty' in every region is a deadening condition of mind. In religion certainty is the end of all liveliness and entreaty—'for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for?' In fact, 'certainty' is the end of faith. What therefore seems to me to be almost our first task in these days as preachers is to remind everybody that, according to the Christian interpretation, life is a fight, a good fight indeed but a fight which will take all the brain a man has, and all the moral endurance; and even then he will always be on the point of giving way before the face of life and death, and *will* give way if he do not keep well in the love of God, and surround himself with his fellow-men

who feel with him the common pathos and share the common hope.

For life—and this not as philosophers and dramatic writers see it, but as it comes to us all one by one—is so dark and wild and to all appearance so disorderly and senseless that only by faith, which is a kind of sweat of the soul, and only by fellowship and the contact of others who see what we see and are purposed with us nevertheless to bless life for Christ's sake, can we men beat up against the contradictions of experience.

We want to bring home to men in our day something of the dangerousness of life. We want to tell every man that his faith is not his own until he has reconquered it on the field of his own experience. That there is no disinterested knowledge of God. That man's true food—the gift of God indeed—is

something which is to be gathered every day. That if any one thinks HE at least has a store of spiritual resource laid by, and begins like a dotard to talk about other days when, it may be, he had an overflowing faith, such a man will find if he is honest that an old faith, a faith not freshly conquered, a faith not daily exercised and for some new and living reason vividly and passionately embraced, is a thing which dies within a man, and ceases to be food, even as the manna in the wilderness when one laid it up to draw upon in later days had ceased to be food and stank.

I have tried to describe this familiarity and want of any sense of urgency or feeling, with regard to what Christianity has to say about the forgiveness of sins. But I might have chosen any other great disclosure to which the mind of

the Church has come under the historical influence of Jesus Christ. Our belief in God itself we all of us take far too easily. To believe in God is from one point of view a lonely and desperate achievement. Or, to put the same thing in language which may sound less strange though having the identical meaning, faith is the Gift of God, the response from Him to one whom life has in fact or in imagination robbed of every merely external support, who nevertheless will not curse life but will bless it. 'I thank Thee, O Father, that I have known Thee,' our Lord ejaculated, face to face with the excruciating agony which was the price He was ready to pay—and the price He paid—for His knowledge. And for this we call Him, Lord and God.

Now it would be almost nothing but good for masses of people who hang

indolently about the Church to have a kind of bomb exploded in their near neighbourhood. That, far more effectively than the disgraceful use of our wits to work up what is called an interest in religion, might bring back that beating of the breast and moral wakefulness without which, for my own part, I have no hope of any lyrical and authentic return to faith.

If we laboriously and regularly assure people that God is real and near, and that the terms on which one may become sure of Him and may secure His interest are so cheap, that really if people would only understand how very cheap they are they would not hesitate to accept those terms — like a man trying to dispose of goods to people in from the country—nothing worth while will ever come of that kind of thing. And besides, that way of

talking misrepresents the facts. It is no easy thing first and last to believe in God. The whole Bible is the record of man's agony to find God, and having found Him, not to lose Him. The classical proofs for the existence and nature and will of God may have had for certain periods in the history of the western world a value; and there may be individual moods when the parade of reason may help a sensitive mind round some dead centre. But perhaps we have always exaggerated the value of such proofs; and even when they have an influence, that influence may easily be perverted to a man's own destruction, encouraging him to suppose that he may claim for himself, as a belief in God, merely that state of mind when a man seems to have some argument from reason on an abstract issue.

We cannot be too firm and unqualified in declaring that there is no coercive proof of God ; that we see God by faith, that is to say, by loyalty, by implicit obedience to that shudder which comes over us when we look out upon this world, and think for one moment that the alternative to faith may be true. By some means we must bring home to the minds of those who frequent our churches, and to the outside world so far as it cares to pay attention to what we say, that the entire spiritual interpretation of life, that interpretation which rests upon a conviction that God is and that He cares for us, is something difficult, something which has to meet the ceaseless challenge of conflicting things ; something also from which man, with his animal propensities and his instinct to defend himself in his own apostasies, may easily drift. That

the whole relationship, in short, between God and man, between the unseen and the seen, between the ideal world of which the best souls amongst us have dreamed and the actual world as it is and as, in our own very day, it has shown its fell capacity for becoming—that that relationship is so delicate, so subtle, so personal, that apart from the continual society of Jesus, and the daily baptism of our spirits in His faith and outlook and experience of God, apart also from the community of those who are striving, as we are striving, for that same faith which is the victory over the world, the relationship, resting as it does upon insight and tenderness and humility and necessity—that is to say, upon ceaseless supplication—will pass away.

The fact is, wherever I look round

about me in these days, I see the bad consequences both in Church and State of this casual, familiar, idle and spuriously confident attitude to the habits and institutions of the spirit. We are always falling into the vice of supposing that we live in a settled world, where, because the rule of God is declared to be over it, things somehow are bound to turn out all right. If things on the whole and in the long run are going to be all right, he is a surly and disheartening fellow who would suggest that even as they are they are not pretty well! For, as Abraham Lincoln, we remember, once observed, things are all right if they are getting better, and equally, of course, things must be getting better if in the end they are going to be all right! And so people who have themselves no urgent sense of the tragic basis of

life, such as comes to us one by one through death or shame or poverty, may easily be corrupted by the very sense of security. But surely it is the very business of religion to disturb that security until men go about, sensitive and humble, depending consciously upon God.

Parallel to this widespread mood of familiarity and indolence with regard to the meaning of life, there is another mood which lies about the heart of man in our day. I mean the mood of exhaustion and scepticism. In many quarters it is a mood which is hardly conscious of itself, but in finer minds it is perceived very clearly to be what indeed it is—the absence from the heart of man of any urgent sense of God. It was not to be supposed that the work of criticism could go on as it has been

doing for the last hundred years, disturbing and undermining so many edifices which had gathered round about the central mystery of faith, without straining that central mystery itself and, it may be, in countless cases changing that mystery into a sad or proud negation. For faith, because at the outset it is the deepest thing in man, comes later on to have its outworks, its expressions, like the branches and the leaves of a tree. Any building which has survived some hundreds of years comes to rest not merely upon its original foundation, but upon the very soil that surrounds the foundation; so that it is always hazardous to be fumbling about the roots of things, especially if the fumbler has a touch of malice. And so we should not be surprised to find, as we do find in our day, great numbers of people, probably

not very vocal or intrusive, who, seeing this and that deprived, as it seems to them, of any valid reason, begin to suspect that the same devastating force as has caused the outworks of faith to collapse, will soon violate the Holy of Holies, and make even of IT, that 'Holy of Holies,' with their horrid and altogether damnable psycho-analysis and the rest, a common thing, significant of nothing beyond itself.

This leads me quite naturally to deal with a subject to which I wished very much at some point in these conversations to make reference. I mean the question of apologetic preaching, of preaching in defence of the faith; or, as we should say in these thoroughgoing days, in defence of faith of any kind. In this matter I am pretty clear in my own mind as to how one ought to

proceed. If a man comes to me with an ultimate difficulty about life, it will depend altogether upon the bearing of the man what line I shall take with him. If he comes jauntily and talks in a chirpy way about his having got beyond all faith, I shall say nothing; for in a case of that kind there is nothing to be said. You must bide your time with a man like that until life has led him on to some loneliness or confusion of mind, such as in this spiritual universe every man soon or late arrives at.

In taking such an attitude one may claim to be following the precise example of our Blessed Lord. One source, surely, of His serenity of mind, of that quietness and absence of haste which distinguished Him from all merely anxious reformers, was just here: that He waited upon God. He waited until God, working through life, had provoked in a man a

certain sensitiveness and attitude of entreaty; whereupon, if such a man consulted Him, our Lord would, as in the case of Nicodemus, spend all night upon the housetop, in the hope that truth might dawn upon them both together.

Generally speaking, it is well not to take a man more seriously than he takes himself. It is this very profound wisdom which accounts for the apparent cynicism in what surely is the best apologetic in our language, 'Bishop Blougram's Apology.' For sometimes those people who approach us are really wishing to show off, and you only encourage them if you take them too conscientiously. A little humour is an excellent thing on such an occasion.

I remember, long ago, a man coming to me—an able man, a reader of many books, of an interesting and various

culture; but at the same time he had certain rather observable weaknesses. He had not a very retentive recollection of certain financial obligations, and sometimes he permitted himself to be gay to the point of excess. I remember overtaking him on a country road in Perthshire many years ago. After a few casual remarks on one side and the other, he said, assuming a thoughtful frown, that he personally had some great difficulties. 'Such as——?' I inquired. 'Oh well,' he said, 'I have great difficulties about the Deity of Christ.' Whereupon I said — and the words were out almost before I had time to order them—'But are not you a little weak on the ten commandments?' It was, as the Book of Proverbs says, 'as though a dart had struck through his liver'! We went on, until some minutes afterwards, when we

separated in absolute silence. I hate to be silent to a fellow-man, but I somehow felt that the whole reality of God depended upon my maintaining silence there and then.

I remember on another occasion a young fellow, trying I think to shock me, told me that he did not get to church on a Sunday because, as a matter of fact, he always golfed on a Sunday. Now I believe if one is always about his Master's business it will happen to him as our Lord promised, it will be given to him in the moment to say what he ought to say. To this man who explained that he could not attend the public worship of God because he had this regular engagement, and who said it all quite jauntily, I replied with equal jauntiness that of course I could not golf on a Sunday because I was preaching. But, I added, I thought I

should not golf on a Sunday even supposing I was not preaching; that of course it might all be a matter of taste, but that taste is a very decisive thing about a man. For surely a man's taste is the finest consequence of his whole personality. 'You know,' I proceeded, 'that a great many people in this village of ours devote their Sunday not only to public worship, which you might think unnecessary; they devote it also to the teaching of little children and the visiting of sick people and so on. Now even supposing, as you a little while ago seemed to indicate, that these things are matters of taste, you cannot deny that these people who teach little children and visit those who are sick, and at any rate try to take a hold of themselves on a Sunday and give certain things a chance which they think have not such a good chance on the other days—you cannot

but admit that these people give evidence of a higher taste; indeed, you cannot but admit that it is the presence of these people up and down the world which is keeping the human race from falling into a ditch.'

One could repeat these stories from one's ministry almost *ad infinitum*. But there is a story told me by a friend of my own, a man with a most enviable power of recommending even in casual ways the beautiful faith which he holds. He was travelling, as a matter of fact, from Newcastle to Edinburgh, and found himself alone except for one man who sat opposite him. The man, observing my friend's clerical dress, said with a kind of leer, 'You still go in for that kind of thing, do you?' 'What do you mean?' said my friend. 'Oh, preaching.' 'Oh yes,' he said. 'Now, now,' said the man, and proceeded. Out

came all the stock and stale arguments and difficulties. My friend sat patiently, not interrupting. At length the stranger had said his say, whereupon my friend said: 'Now look here. You and I until a few moments ago were strangers to one another. I am not going to refer to what might be regarded as the discourtesy of your words, or to the veiled charge of insincerity which underlay all that you have said. I would only ask you to believe that you have said things which have wounded me, things which have hurt me as much as though you had brought aspersions against the honour of my own mother. You will admit I have listened with patience. I have said nothing, but it was hard to say nothing. Now, sir, will you allow me to say one thing, and one thing only. I am going to ask you one question. It is this. Have you always been and

are you at this moment the kind of man you ought to be?' Whereupon, my friend told me, a wonderful compunction seemed to grip this man, and he replied, 'God knows I have not, and God knows I am not.' 'Oh, well,' said my friend, 'that is where Christianity begins.'

On the whole, I am not very much touched to-day by the case of those who have, as they allege, *intellectual* reasons for abandoning faith. For one thing, as I have said, I am quite hopeless as we all are face to face with these cases. No man will have faith who does not acknowledge his need of faith. Faith is light from heaven falling upon a bankrupt spirit: the still small voice after the earthquake and the fire and the mighty wind. Faith is something deeper than despair. Difficulty about

life, where it is genuinely felt to-day, has a basis other than the human reason narrowly considered. For the ultimate question to-day in honourable minds, where that question has arisen, is not, Is Christianity true? but Is it possible? Besides the difficulties which occur to any thinking man in reconciling this world as it is with the alleged ceaseless government and control of God, and that God such a God as can be called the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—besides that aspect of the problem which takes us back into the Mid-Victorian period both for the statement of it and, as I believe, the best answer to that statement in secular literature such as was given in the poetry of that period—apart, I say, from all these difficulties which have their origin in the desire to establish an intellectual consistency between

thought and things, between faith and the world, there has arisen in honourable minds in our day from another quarter the great misgiving. I repeat, the question as it is put to us now is not, Is Christianity true? but 'Is Christianity possible in this world?' We do not question the ideal truth and perfect beauty of the Christian system; but is it not a dream, and in any case can the thing be lived?

Of course, this is not a new question; it has been in the mind of the Church perhaps from the beginning. A good man may ask to-day how he, for example, can carry out his Christian faith in the actual world which is about him. In that actual world he has to make his livelihood. To say no more, he has to work in order to eat his bread and to provide bread for those who depend upon him. But in that world,

where he must live, he finds conditions in existence and buttressed by tradition which honestly make it hard. Even when he can keep clear of any definite transgression, if he be a thinking man, he may feel that he, by his very fidelity to his part of the machine, is perpetuating a state of matters which involves injustice on some larger scale. That, my young friends, is an aspect of things with which you will often have to deal. There is a danger that face to face with it we in the Church may lose our heads. And so let us look at this matter for a little while rather closely. It may be that when I have said all that I have to say about it, I shall have not removed a certain intractable core; but what I shall say I shall say honestly and with deliberateness.

I begin by saying something which we are apt to forget. Whatever Chris-

tianity in its essence may be, it is something which Christ, the Founder of it, thought could be lived in this world. He was perfectly aware that the thing He had given men, the thing which men were to embody in their life, was something which would encounter a hostile and reluctant and resisting world. But whatever we may say of Christ's commission to His disciples, we may say this, that He did not ask them to do what was impossible, or to be in this world something which, from the nature of the case, was ridiculous. And again: S. Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth; and some Christians lived in Corinth. Now, if the Gospel is something which could be preached in Corinth, and if Christianity is something which could be lived in Corinth, then the Gospel can be preached anywhere, and Christianity has its function any-

where. Of course, S. Paul might have broken his heart over Corinth, and in Corinth his heart very nearly broke. But it nearly broke not because Corinth was so bad as it was, but because Christian people were not so good as they should have been. And if we Christian ministers or people ever allow our hearts to break, let us see to it that it is not because the world is what it is, but because we are what we are.

Well, that is the first thing. Tertullian, two centuries later (A.D. 160-220), had no difficulty in proving that Christianity was an absolutely impossible career in this world; that not only was a Christian soldier a contradiction in terms, but a Christian butcher or baker or candlestick-maker was an equal contradiction in terms. I believe it was for this—namely, that Tertullian's logical consistency was threatening to

stultify the human conscience, and to make men, and especially to make Christian men seem futile and ridiculous to themselves—that the Church has never put Tertullian on the calendar of saints. By an instinct which they somehow felt, though they might not be able to defend that instinct in mood and figure, they decided that on this matter Tertullian was wrong, and that to have adopted his principles would have made of the Church an inhuman rather than a spiritual body, standing aloof from the world, secretly praying like Jonah for its destruction.

Now God loved the world, and loved it to such a pitch that He sent His Son Christ Jesus into the world, to tell the world how matters stood. That is the second thing that I wanted to say.

The next thing is this—a principle that I make a great deal of in my own mind,

not that I may take refuge in it from anger and denunciation of human greed and cruelty, but in order to save myself from a feeling that my task in the world is a futile one, because what I am asking people to become is not possible. It is this principle: that the Church of Christ is not the mind of the world, but the conscience of the world; that in a sense the Church of Christ is not here to do everything, though it is here to see that everything that has to be done, shall be done. It is here also to create the personalities who will charge themselves with doing what is necessary; and it is here to stand behind them and fortify them, and to assure them of the support of God in the days of their failure, and when, because of the hardness of men's hearts and the slowness of the pace, they might well give up the good fight. I have often thought that

we might bring home to other great communities of the spirit—which deal with man perhaps not at the very centre of his life, and perhaps not with man face to face with ultimate probabilities—their responsibilities for things as they are. It is not only ministers who should preach. Every man and every profession, and every trade and occupation which believes in itself and claims to be serving some permanent human interest, should also advocate the principles of its own mystery. The faculty of law should have its street-corner preachers, seeking to erect in the mind of the man in the street some sense of the inviolableness of personal discipline and social order.

Trade unions should have their street-corner preachers, who now and then should give themselves a change from their advocacy of rights, which, after

all, deals with man on a purely animal level, and should speak to their fellow-workers as I am speaking to you in these conversations, of the dignity of their calling, and that God will judge them by their fidelity to obscure details. And what a field for open-air preaching the practice of medicine offers to a good physician! What sins are practised, what things go on about which they and they only are qualified to speak! What a terror of the body, such as might awaken the spirit, they could create by announcing their irrefutable knowledge! And so on and on.

All that I am contending for at the moment is that we are not here to do everything, though it is our contract with Christ that we shall stay here till everything is done.

Well, now, for the sake of all to-day who are in trouble about life and about

the possibility of holding on to the ideal in this ambiguous world, I think we preachers of course are here to declare that to hold on for the highest in this very world is surely of the very essence of Christian faith; that it is the precise nature of faith that it must always be in difficulties; that the thing which ought to be written on the tombstone of those of us who are true exponents of the mind of Christ is just that beautiful set of words with which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews sums up the story of the faithful line of men who kept the Hebrew heart alive unto God: 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but seeing them afar off and being persuaded of them.'

* * * *

Certainly, the longer I live, and the more I ponder things, the simpler faith

and Christian Faith becomes to me. I look out upon this world, upon nature, upon history, upon the ups and downs of my own soul, upon the oscillations of the flesh and the spirit in the general mind; I look out upon all these and I can see that the whole scene is capable of two equally competent interpretations. If I make up my mind that there is nothing in the whole business—that life is a rotten thing—well, I can find many things to support that dreadful conclusion. It takes no great ability to perceive the darkness in this world. But because that is a *dreadful* conclusion I feel with my whole being that it is not the conclusion which the Author of my life, if it have an Author, or my life itself, if that be my final authority, would have me adopt. When I call any conclusion a *dreadful* conclusion I mean, unless I am trifling with words, that it is

a conclusion which I dare not acquiesce in. I feel about such a thing that I am here to protest against it. I am here to appeal to men to join with me in protesting against it. I am here, too, to remove so far as I can the facts and circumstances which give that sinister conclusion any force it has.

But let us be fair to life even as we know it. Not to speak of the sun and the moon and the stars and the wind upon the heath—all fair and stimulating things—not to speak of the love, the goodness, which creates, by its very presence for those who will deny, a problem not of evil, but the problem of good,—not to speak of all that: starting from my own incorruptible sense that I am here in this world to embody my protest against things as they are in the name of something fairer and nearer to Christ's inten-

tion, I look out upon the world and I find it a field on which I may, so to speak, exercise my vote. I enter the polling booth, and there is a slip of paper with two names and a space opposite each inviting my assent. The one stands for one total view of life, and the other stands for another total view of life. Both have much to say for themselves. And here is where I take my place as a son of God, as called upon to share with God something of the nature of creative power. I put down my cross, and by making my mark a cross, I mean to say that *there* is what, if need be, I am ready to die for. My faith is my vote.

Now this view of things, if it be not the final and absolute way of stating the matter, does provide a way of escape from my own sense of intellectual difficulty, because it takes the whole

subject out of the region of the merely intellectual. If a man comes to me and says, 'But, sir, I have great difficulties in this whole matter of Christian belief; good—goodness, how hard they are to believe as of the very essence of things and as bound one day to penetrate the world!'—to this man, if he be sincere and humble, I shall answer: 'My dear sir, do you suppose that I have no difficulties? What is my faith but my acknowledgment of difficulties? Why, the difficulties are so deep and overwhelming that God sent His Son into the world to tilt the balance to the side of faith. But what I ask you is what I ask myself. It is this: would you like to believe in God? Would you like the best to rule the world? Then your faith is your pledge to God that you will live for these things.'

It is because these great things which

must not perish are contradicted and threatened by the dark forces that control in a measure this world, it is because of them that we cling to Christ, and that we love His Church in its pure idea. For Christ, who had a finer eye than we have, must have seen the dark conflicting things with a more horrid edge; but it is His greatness that He believed. And what makes us Christians is that in this we are ready to follow Him.

We vote for God against the insinuation of life and death. Let us vote for Christ against the natural passions of the body and the soul. Looking out upon all opposing things and aware within ourselves of horrid threatenings, we say to ourselves, if our spirit be unbroken, life is our task, and we are not alone.

# LECTURE IV

## IV

It may seem to some of you that I have dwelt disproportionately on what in my own view should be the conscious background of all Christian preaching in our day, leaving in consequence a hurried opportunity for dealing with more practical matters and points of detail. But it will always be well to leave the lecturer on this Foundation absolutely free to work out his own idiosyncrasy. Otherwise, that is to say, if there be an accepted programme which each in turn has to work upon, it will be a dull business a few years hence.

Besides, in the long run the Church will recover after every crisis and will survive not by any display of adroitness

or superficial resource, not by living from hand to mouth. She will recover and survive by the truth and inevitableness of her spiritual direction, and largely by the candour and conviction of her accredited exponents. We shall have something to say about manners and methods, and faults and the correction of faults; and yet, speaking for myself, I will never regard these as the supreme matters. If a man feels with his whole being the truth, that is to say, the necessity of what he is saying—that it is something of such a kind that if men disregard it or repudiate it they will exhaust the patience of God with their generation and make life a bitter thing—if a man has that feeling as the living overflow of his habitual thinking about God and about life and about Christ's intervention and about the liabilities of the human soul, how tragic and

sinister things are always impending — almost everything essential in an honourable Christian ministry will have been secured. He may not succeed as the world counts success. Probably he will not succeed as the world reckons. He may not even succeed as congregations and Presbyteries and General Assemblies count success — the more shame to them. But he will succeed as a servant of the Lord Jesus, and as His Master succeeded—in living day by day for great things, with a soul above the ridiculous ambitions of uninspired and worldly men. He will succeed in carrying his own fine seriousness like Pater's white bird through the crowded market-place, with wings ruffled and bruised it may be, but certainly unbroken. And when all is said, what is it that is in our mind when we adore and magnify our Lord but this, though doubtless not this

alone, that He maintained His depth of soul and seriousness, His sense of God, and His tragic sense of life on to the end, and, despite the contradiction of experience, died aware only of God and of the pathos of the lives of men.

Why, even in the matter of speaking, a man's voice will always carry further when he is saying something which relates himself at the moment to some poignantly felt human necessity and to God, in whom all true necessity finds something greater and still deeper than itself.

An instruction which I might as well give here as elsewhere is this: that when our voice in preaching has become slack and listless, and we feel a silly and unprofitable pain at the back of our eyes as we try to look at a manuscript and at the people in the same instant, and all the while try to look thoughtful—when

all that happens, in nine cases out of ten the explanation is that we are not saying anything vital and commanding at the moment and we know we are not. What makes for tediousness above everything else is the want in the preacher's voice of the sense of the value at the moment to himself of what he happens to be saying.

Now in nearly all that I have written so far, I have at least been meaning to say that the business with which we have been charged is something of such a kind that, in our view—and it is because it is our view we are here—for the world to neglect it or to misunderstand it or to be allowed to go on in its own ways as though it could for more than a short time afford to neglect it or to misunderstand it, is for the world to get on to sloping ground which at any moment may take a sudden drop and

lead abruptly to a steep place into the sea.

At the beginning it was never on any mere admiration of the qualities of the man Jesus that the Church of Christ launched out with something corybantic in its joy. It was because in Jesus men saw the Christ, the answer to some long-contradicted but never-abandoned hope that one day there would be a movement from the side of God to right this world. And the soul of man has returned to Christ—as often as it has returned with adoration and abandonment, with joy and singing—only when knowing itself fundamentally embarrassed and on the edge of some despair, it has seen in the Christ of God an open door. In short, wherever and whenever Jesus has been loved and adored as God, loved to the point of suffering for His sake, and singing

about Him, men and women too happy and full to distinguish between Him and God—it has never been for His own qualities so to speak; but always in consequence of a total revulsion from a world which without Him was and without Him is and ever will be, harsh, senseless, rotten, a field for grossness and sensuality on the part of the baser sort, and giving ground in the minds of the finer sort for cynicism, and bitterness, and despair.

Once again, you are fortunate who are to preach the way of Christ to this generation. You need not buy books to assure you that yours is a real calling, which only true and doomed men can fulfil. You need never—as we in those old slack days, before the world in its pride and atheism broke down, had need to search books of short stories, doubtless none of them quite true—as

a really fine story is never true—to prove that what we were saying had a value. You need not even spend time trying to convince your hearers that unless they hearken and obey they will in the end of the days miss the Beatific Vision, or let loose upon themselves some such rare and most exquisite retribution. You can come at once to the realism and to the immediateness of the New Testament, and of the great days of Hebrew prophecy—the days which gave to us Westerners all the moral soul we have—you can come at once to these and declare, not as some merely pulpiteering piece of rhetoric, but as a cold, sad, urgent statement of the fact, that without this Christ of ours, and without Christ's God, and Christ's conscience of good and evil, and Christ's willingness to suffer death rather than that things as they are should go on

another day unrebuked, unsummoned to a Holy Bar—without all this, the human race, we, Europe, America, the dimly agitated East, will in anger and suspicion feel for each other; and one day, beginning in some twilit hour, twilit from the absence of faith, and all through the night, men whom God intended to help each other will work each other's ruin and death, and there will be darkness over the whole earth—as when once before in history Jesus was crucified of men.

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And now, let us deal with 'preaching' if we may, not so exclusively as a calling, as the reassertion, that is to say, in contemporary life of Christ's historical intervention; let us think of preaching somewhat more directly as a craft. To speak of preaching as a craft is by no means to disparage preaching as a

calling. S. Paul invited us to rebuke ourselves and to be ashamed of ourselves—of our impatience and sluggishness and indolence, compared with the training which men impose upon themselves with a view to some corruptible crown. And we have the saying, that what is worth doing is worth doing well. There is nothing more worthy or honourable in a Christian minister than his desire to do everything possible to be worthy of his Master. We are earthen vessels, says S. Paul. And it is only decent that we should keep such vessels as we are clean and in repair. Especially of course are we to see that this vessel which one by one we are is kept in direct communication with its sources of power. This is what S. Augustine means—using a figure which the Fathers seemed to think very fitting—when he pleads with preachers not to

regard themselves as pipes, but as reservoirs. And it is a very good point. S. Paul and the Fathers mean the same thing. Nothing could be further from S. Paul's idea than that any of us should be a mere channel, a mere pipe lying about anywhere. The complete idea of a channel is that something is passing through it. But there is a good deal of fine instruction in S. Augustine's metaphor of a reservoir, though he would have been ready to grant that a reservoir without orderly channels, though it might improve the landscape, was not doing all that it might do for the world. What, I have no doubt, that very able man meant by asking us preachers to consider ourselves not as pipes but as reservoirs is something which is so good that in my own opinion it says almost everything necessary. For there are two ways in which water may

issue from a source—from a pail, let us say.

Let us imagine a pail into which a spout is pouring. Well, I say there are two ways in which water may come from that pail. The pail may run over, or it may run out. If I may abandon all literary decency for the moment, we are so many pails. And I say we may run over or we may run out. The water may come over the top, or it may come from a hole in the pail. That hole may be near the top or near the bottom. When it is near the top the result is not so bad : when it is near the bottom it is altogether bad. Without metaphor, it is only what has gone into us and has filled us so that it must overflow, it is only that which is honourably our own. For only that which overflows is qualified by our personality and conveys our personality, and becomes that com-

bination of the absolute and the relative, of the universal and the particular, of the living God and an actual breathing man—which is preaching. In preaching a man should not be speaking about things ; he should rather be speaking out of things, out of a sense of them. Indeed that only is power ; and what comes from a man, having had such an interior and previous history, can never be without influence. Words spoken thus are spirit, and they are life. Perhaps it is this which makes the idea of discussion after preaching very obnoxious to me. The only occasions when it seems to me such discussion would be appropriate are the occasions when the preacher is himself aware—and unless he has corrupted his conscience no one knows better or knows earlier—that he has failed. When I have preached with the wind behind me,

when, without affectation or any qualifying prejudice of my own so far as I know my own heart—and it is part of a preacher's function to know his own heart thoroughly—I have been dealing with true and inevitable things, I don't want to hear what you think about my message. If you *must* speak about it, there is God. If the truth about you is rather that you would like to have some matter cleared up, why not go home and think about it. No matter of supreme consequence is cleared up by the assistance of an outsider. Besides, if you give time to what you have heard, who knows but that after a night's sleep—and a Psalmist declared that often through the night God helped him to see the point—you also may see clearly where you thought you had seen nothing. In any case, in those moments, not too rare, thank God, when

with a happy weariness and gratefulness after preaching I seem to be able to lift up my face to God without spot, having sought nothing but His glory and a fair field for His truth—at such moments I certainly don't want to hear anybody speak. If any one were to get up there and then and ask me even for such an apparently proper thing as, say, the reason I had for holding some view, I think I should reply with that fine crack of Nietzsche's whip, You ask me for reasons ? Reasons ! Am I a barrel that I should carry about my reasons with me. And this would not be mere petulance or professional dignity. It would be a proper defence of the dignity of truth. I have either said something of value and force for that man who would now speak, or I have not. Even he cannot at that moment say which has been the case with him. For time

is of the very essence of any fine influence.

By the silence which the experience of the Church enjoins—an injunction which I heartily support—we are doing what we can to keep open and unsettled, until a man himself shall settle it, some subtle appeal or misgiving or uneasiness which conceivably may have come to him. I often say to my own people and to congregations up and down the world, If you can controvert anything I am saying, please pay no heed to it. It is evidently not saving truth for you. But if, as I have been speaking, something has come to you which seems to you to be true, in that case pay heed to it and to your own uneasiness—for indeed in that subtle but obstinate business of the soul you are dealing not with me, but with God.

And in all this we may quote, without

any pressure from our own prejudice, those words of Jesus : ' I judge no man : but if I judge, my judgment is true : for I am not alone, but the Father is with me.'

I impose myself—so we may reverently and adequately construe our Lord's words—I impose myself upon no one. If a man hearing me hears nothing, that, at this moment, closes the matter. But if a man hearing me hears something which on his own witness might be God—if I judge a man—to that a man must pay heed or consent to the diminution or darkening of his own soul.

I was led into this digression by an observation I had made. Let us return to it and continue on the main road. I was saying in effect that what we might call a man's best things are not his own. They are the Word of God through him, and by way of his personality.

Let me pause on that word 'personality.' For 'the Power of Personality is part of the native truth of things,' and is the only possible key to the mystery of life. A man's personality is the diagonal line taken by his own original life-force in ceaseless intercourse with his circumstances. It is the individual resource and power by which a man bears up against life and transmutes his environment.

With regard to personality or character, the human mind as represented in schools of thought oscillates between two positions.

There are times when the accent is put altogether upon the original force of a man, and it is alleged that by strength of will one may cut his way through life and master circumstances. The Victorian age celebrated that aspect of the truth. There are other times—such

as those in which we live—when, to say no more, we are not so sure. The greatest confidant of the human soul in the secular literature of our time was probably Henry James, who with a fine spirit is always seeking to stand by his characters, full of compassion for them one and all having their lot in this embarrassed time and called upon to feel their way, distracted as they are by so many bold and shallow commentators on life, and having no star overhead hailed by all the best souls as a star indeed. And so his characteristic persons fight all the way, the stronger ones steadily edging back the various impediments of life, the less strong ones being steadily edged away from some earlier apprehended path by mounting circumstance. And so even the best come through life slightly damaged, which is no news to us who know our

New Testament, and the saying about ‘ entering into life maimed.’

The Fathers of the Secession—a very noble stream of thought and feeling which perhaps should be more celebrated amongst us, for it is gravely to diminish the greatness of our Church to suppose that it came into being so recently as 1843—the Fathers of the Secession were so thoroughgoing as to declare that there was no such thing as free-will until a man had made God and Christ the principle, the motive and conscience of his life.

But resisting all inclination to pursue these matters, it is enough to say that men, as we see them and get to know them in the world, are of two kinds, those with a plus vitality and those who have no plus, who may even begin life with a minus.

Still, as the Bible puts it, perhaps meaning something slightly different, ‘ the race is not always to the swift nor

the battle to the strong.' It is a familiar observation—which has become current and immortal in the story of the tortoise and the hare—that it is not always the man with the best original equipment who achieves most for himself or does most for the world. But any of those books of stories—so greatly to be avoided by us ministers—will give you illustrations in abundance. And what these stories illustrate is a real fact—and a thing full of promise for us average men. It is this, that the difference between an originally able man and an originally average man comes in the long run to be not nearly so great, as the difference between the gifts of a man who presumes upon those gifts and the total fitness of another who, knowing his shortcomings, has consecrated and harnessed to a fine purpose such gifts as he had.

You will get all this, and a great deal more on the same line, all incomparably put down, in Emerson's paper entitled 'Personal Power' in the series on *The Conduct of Life*. He says there, or, if he does not, I shall say it myself, that there are two methods by which a man may add to his personal force for life, if he was not born with an overflowing vitality of spirit. For one thing, he must keep hammering at it, not only striking while the iron is hot, for it is this man's doom that the iron for him is rarely hot, but striking the iron *until* it is hot. I shall be dealing with that later, and when I come to speak of the production of a sermon. But our Lord put His own seal to that insight when He said that 'the Kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force'; and again when He told the story of the importunate widow

and the triumph she secured simply because she would not be beaten.

The other method is—exclude irrelevancies, concentrate. As Carlyle put it, if you wish to increase the value of your poor fraction of power, reduce the denominator. On this I can recall that Emerson almost buries our mind with illustrations.

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There are two main sources of power and personal equipment on which I should like to speak in turn. You will be so good as assume much that I should wish to say of a still more intimate and indeed sacred character. I am trying for the moment to consider our vocation as preachers under the aspect of a craft, as, in fact, our mystery.

And first as a main source of equipment I should like to speak of ' reading ' —and of reading for the moment in the

restricted sense of reading with a view to preaching. Of course the truth is that we preachers arrive at a point—call it either of personal fidelity or of corruption—when all our reading comes to be related to our ministry of preaching. We are always coming across points, ideas, illustrations: and if we are wise we shall carry about a note-pad and a fountain pen—not a pencil. Later you excuse yourself for not attending to a piece of indistinct pencil-writing: whereas what is down in ink gets on to your conscience. You may feel this to be a nuisance, for after you have written down the point or idea or passage, it is almost certain that in the very writing of it something else will have occurred to you of your very own. Still if you are wise, or even if you will take the advice of an old hand like myself, you will, at any cost of inconvenience or

inclination, go on writing, even though it be under a lamp, until the momentary inspiration has exhausted itself. Hobbes carried an inkhorn in the head of his walking-stick, and would interrupt himself anywhere to unscrew the head of his stick and put down anything that seemed to flash into his mind, and so *The Leviathan* was written. Cherish those flashes; for it is the very nature of a flash to light up a circle which until that very moment lay dark and useless. I think you will find as you get older in the ministry—and I promise you that one of the minor compensations of our work is that we all come to be specialists in psychology and, in a sense, get to know everything—you will find, I was going to say, that your mind has two entirely different kinds of ability; and it has them both at once—whereupon speaking for myself

I would not exchange my work in the world for all the pomp of emperors, indeed I wouldn't exchange much less for the pomp of emperors — when at length after hard and persistent pressure something melts within you and the right words come. At one time, and here indeed I can only speak for myself, my mind behaves in a snappy, jerky way, flinging little bits of truth, of insight, of spiritual observation at me— this in a kind of ill-natured way almost, as though it were saying, you are always at me for this kind of thing : very well, there you are : take it now when I know very well you would rather not take out your notebook, but would fain sit still reading or dreaming. On such occasions, I always—well perhaps not always, but if I fail I blame myself very sharply later—take out my pen and paper, and thank my rather grumpy

master. There is, in the human soul, that is to say, a recurring mood of fertility and creativeness. It is the mood when something dawns upon us, as we say; and it certainly has the effect of light. It offers us a solving word upon life or upon some aspect of life. It is probably related to some earlier time of pressure and sincerity, and is the reward of some previous state of tension and fidelity which we may have forgotten. But in any case, such moments come: and it is almost the whole art of life as well as of writing, to honour and welcome and make much of those sudden invasions, or more strictly speaking those sudden offers of power. It is a fine and entirely worthy pride and happiness that comes over a man when this gift of the spirit has come to him. If we think wisely and religiously of it, it redeems our day from common-

ness. Such lights that play about the soul remind us that we have allies. They persuade us also that we live in a responding world, where Some One whom we cannot but think of as God is in relation to us. And so there is probably no one in all the world whose life is so full of secret proofs of God as is the life of a hard-working preacher, who no matter how poor his gifts are is resolved that his work shall have the best of him, for it shall have all of him. Indeed it is this that gives to a true preacher's life something of a substitutionary and priestly character. He is for ever standing alone between things seen and things unseen. He ministers from morning until even, and far on into the night, at that altar of God which the heart of man is. He knows what it involves of mental toil to believe that 'the spirit of a man is

the Candle of the Lord,' how it lays upon him the delicate task, which he can depute to no other, of reading by a tiny but most authentic light the small print of his own soul. But once again, cherish those moments of insight that seem so casual and vagrant. They have had a long journey coming to you from the Father of Lights through the unlit depths and corridors of your soul. 'While ye have light,' said our Lord, 'believe in the light.' And again, 'While ye have light, walk in the light.' S. Paul, who knows everything about us preachers, and who can do everything for us in the way of guidance, who above everything else can put us to shame—S. Paul has something of the kind in his view when he says, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

And Robert Browning is so full of this

same instruction to us that I should say it is his supreme contribution. Here I must not let myself loose, or I should never come back. But for myself I want nothing truer, finer, more exact, more spacious than the closing verse of 'Memorabilia':

'I crossed a moor with a name of its own
And a certain use in the world, no doubt;
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
'Mid the blank miles round about.
For there I picked up on the heather,
And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather!
Well, I forget the rest.'

* * * *

But there is another and a totally different mood in which our whole being may present itself to us at any time. A pedestrian kind of mood this, but one of which prompt use should be made. Our mind at such a time has nothing fresh to give us; but if we care it will

work out certain insights which came to us at some more fruitful time. It will go over a sermon with us and make some very shrewd and for the most part not flattering suggestions to us about it. It will probably counsel you to leave out great portions of it; and you will be wise to consider that particular suggestion. But there again I am trespassing upon our subsequent business.

To return to reading. As a general observation, I should say, don't read very much with the direct and immediate view to preaching. Read to make an able and wise man of yourself, conversant with life discerned spiritually as life is discerned spiritually in history and philosophy and art including poetry. You see we men of the Reformed Church, and of the Reformed Church over which a Puritan east wind blew for long, have to create our atmosphere. We do not

preach in Cathedrals. We are therefore to carry our Cathedral about with us, so to speak. And what is the grace of a Cathedral but just this—it speaks to us of the test of time, of beauty also, and of a day in the history of the human soul when men were sure of God. All that we must somehow bring in spirit with us, or we must be able to invoke it.

In building a Cathedral, depths and spaces are created and reserved beneath the surface more than are actually necessary, in order that the speaking or the singing voice may have an added resonance through the nave and aisles. I should not wonder if this were true. It is most certainly true of that temple not made with hands in which we must minister to God who would minister worthily. For crypt we must have the sober knowledge of past times, of

the profound liabilities of human nature as history discloses these : and for nave the artists and the poets and the prophets who have uttered through all ages the indomitable protest of the spirit against tyranny and mechanism and any ultimate fear.

I know of nothing more tedious in a sermon than a trifling illustration such as a man may have seen with the tail of his eye in a Saturday night's paper. I know of nothing which gives such force and intellectual pressure to a sermon as an illustration which springs naturally from a background of sound reading.

And now to hasten, for I perceive that I am bound now to miss multitudes of things which I have to say. Let me put down as it were *ex cathedra,* but free from all presuming, what I might have said in form.

* * * *

Read deeply rather than widely. I recall how F. W. Robertson would spend an entire year reading *Hamlet.*

Resist the itch to read little passing books.

Avoid all 'Aids to Preachers' so called; that is the broad road that leadeth to commonplaceness and tediousness.

Save up, if need be, from all those passing feckless books, enough to buy, if you will, one book by some real scholar or master. I myself have always on hand some book which is really beyond me. It has the effect in the mind, to say no more, that the use of dumb-bells has on the muscles. It keeps one humble too: and when we lose humility, all is over with us.

Never read without taking notes: all other reading is self-indulgence and an occasion for sleep.

Ponder also the wisdom of Charles Lamb's confession, 'When a new book is published, I read an old one.'

My friend Dr. Leckie said nearly all that is to be said about reading to those who have ears to hear: Read what you like. That is to say, be a reading man. Then, Read what you don't like. And then, Read what you ought to like.

After thirty a man in the ministry should, I think, write more than he reads. After thirty a wakeful man in the ministry should know more in certain regions than has ever been written. For, to say no more, writing out of one's own insight and experience is in its way creation, and brings with it a certain sober self-respect which may help one to meet some low and petty trouble in those very days—which otherwise would soil his soul.

And besides, 'the Unfinished is No-

thing' : and thoughts and feelings are apt to hang about the soul like lazy smoke unless we take occasion to bring to them the flame of some fine intention.

If you will read in bed, read essays. They are neither too dull nor too stirring.

Take long turns of the Bible. Few of you will keep up your Hebrew well enough to read Job and Psalms and the Prophets in the original. That is our infirmity : and we suffer for it. There are more of us who retain our Greek. The Greek New Testament is the best Commentary on the English. If your Greek has grown rusty, read Moffatt, or Weymouth, or the Modern Reader's New Testament. Memorise the Psalms.

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For next to its most blessed compensations—of giving light to those who are perplexed, and seeing with recurring

amazement the Glory of Christ and His finality as God and Man—next to all those things which perhaps had better not be spoken about unless with care and self-restraint, one of the great joys of our hard life as preachers is just this, that we are readers, and in our measure poets and artists and thinkers. Happy is the man, and not without a great Alleviation and Resource, who will not allow his love of true and luminous words to die within him: whose heart leaps at a fine word written about this life of ours, some word which augments for himself life's meaning and its greatness. 'He has meat to eat that the world knows not of.' Round about him may be grayness, monotony, ill-success, and the knowledge that thin-souled men are judging him adversely. But what of all that if he is on candid terms with his Master: and is

a treasurer of the gift of God to men in beautiful haunting words and in the record of certain thrilling occasions of the Spirit. On the morrow he may have some dull disheartening task, some necessary but dismal meeting, or he may be called upon to resist any one of those swarms of mean distresses which like gnats and wasps surround every good man in the ministry once at least. But once again what of all that, if he can set out from or can return to a book, and if he has the wit to choose God's very gift of a comrade to him there and then, and opening the book can read, 'And as we dwell, we living things, in our isle of terror and under the imminent hand of death, God forbid it should be man the erected, the reasoner, the wise in his own eyes—God forbid it should be man that wearies in well-doing, that despairs of unrewarded

effort, or utters the language of complaint. Let it be enough for faith, that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy. Surely not all in vain.'

That is for the soul of a Christian preacher to come within sight of Calvary, and to be lost in wonder, faith, and praise!

# LECTURE V

## V

We live and learn. For a spiritual being indeed, the one is the other. On the exquisite and decisive matters, we must each get to know the methods and practices and habits which best suit us; and we must adhere to them in detail. It is in the detail we break down. There are many who declare that they are ready to shed their last drop of blood who cannot make up their minds to shed their first drop. We may permit ourselves in a peroration to become lyrical over some supreme sacrifice, and yet refuse to get up an hour earlier in the morning. It is not without significance that more than once in the later books of the New Testament—books

written to people who had been Christian long enough for the collar to be beginning to chafe their necks—men like ourselves, whose function it is to deal with words and ideas, are warned not to 'deceive ourselves.' Now, I am not going to probe another's conscience or act the priest to any man. The great doctrine of Reformed Theology is the Universal Priesthood of Believers, and Believers include Ministers. That is to say, we ought to know and be able to name anything in our practice which is disabling us; and if need be to apply the whip to ourselves; and in the end only to forgive ourselves when we have, ourselves being judge, brought forth authentic fruits of repentance.

But I was saying every man must get to know the conditions under which he does his best work, and to adhere to those conditions. If he proposes to

abandon any one of them, it must be on the clear and honest belief that the new practice which he is proposing to adopt, by comparison with the one which he is about to discard, is a severer practice. For that, I take it, is the only honourable way of change, and the feature of anything we may properly call progress—it shall be finer, severer, taking more out of us. This is true in theology and in life. In theology the reason why heretics for the most part have been sued, is that they gave the impression that life in their interpretation of it was an easier thing. They took their breadth out of their depth. And in life, that is no advance in personal behaviour which justifies me in some new slackness. On all this which covers a thousand subtle matters, matters nevertheless of a kind that are fateful to us ministers, I shall say no

more. Let every man obey his own commandment.

I hate giving advice, for, roughly speaking, no one takes it. Yet there must be some interest served on the cosmical scale by the giving of advice, since in spite of all the signs we persist in giving it. If there is one thing which I should suggest above others, it is the wisdom and indeed the necessity of forming habits such as in his best and least entangled moments a man covets for himself. There are certain things—and they ought to be known to ourselves—to which we permit no exception or amendment.

If we decide that we need to read three hours each day, taking notes all the time, then three hours let it be. If, on some particular day, the three hours are necessarily reduced, we would do well to make a note of the loss of

time, and refuse to give our conscience its discharge until we have made up that lost time. For the one thing a man must fight for tooth and nail is that he shall be master of his circumstances; that he shall do with his time what he has decided he must in honour do. A casual and disorderly day has a subtle influence upon our spirit, even going so far as to obscure for us for a time the clear meaning of all life. For we impute ourselves; and if our life is a thing of threads and patches, without any motive above it and mastering it, we begin to give way secretly to the terrible idea that perhaps the whole business rests on the same disorder and equally has no persistent purpose. But short of that, it is a disheartening thing to feel that a precious day has escaped you, and that in the course of it, looking back, you have done nothing.

You may have been busy in some kind of way every hour; and yet, deeper than the sophistry by which you may try to corrupt your own conscience, you know that you have done nothing of real value. You may have attended a committee and, if you live in a big town or a city, may even have looked in at a book-shop. And if you like you can make your reason your accomplice rather than your guide, and may argue that all this genial intercourse with the world is of value. You may even become angry at your own poor little scruples, and accuse your conscience of being behind the times. You may say, a minister *must* go about, *must* be a man: there are too many book-worms in the pulpit; a minister's great book is life; and so forth. I need say nothing to expose these sophistries. You and I know that in

all this we are simply trying to deceive ourselves.

I remember, when I was about to leave my church in a Perthshire village to go to Edinburgh, I had a letter from a friend, a man of outstanding ability in philosophy—of which subject indeed he became a Professor and an Examiner for the London degree—and a very good man. The only reason he could urge on me why I should not go to a city, and especially to a city like Edinburgh, was that the danger besetting a city minister was laziness. I thought for a moment that he was making an epigram. But what he said he meant most seriously; and what he said is true. He knew of course that in any case I should be busy, jumping on cars and off, going to this annual meeting and to that quarterly committee, leaving my desk to hear some noted lion who was

advertised to roar in the neighbourhood, that is to say, to speak or preach at a certain place and hour. And he was afraid that I should succumb to this atmosphere of steady and obscure deterioration. Of course I know that committees must meet, and cars must run, and lions will roar; but I am here to speak on preaching, and, certainly for the first fifteen or twenty years of his ministry, a man if he will engage in all this here-and-thereness must do so with fear and trembling. It may be that many of us should retire from our stated ministries earlier than is the custom, and devote ourselves to these episcopal functions. For the fact is that men who so devote themselves have already in spirit retired from the ministry of preaching.

But perhaps I can get out most simply what I should wish to say on the

technique and craft of our vocation as preachers, if I ask you to accompany me through a day. In all that follows I am thinking of a minister as a preacher, as a sensitive thinking man who conceives his chief and almost only business in the world to be to report to his people on the stated day what God has given to his soul—as he pondered his Bible that week, and looked out upon the world, and observed the movements of his own mind: I am thinking of the kind of minister who has accepted this representative and substitutionary conception of his function.

Well now: in the case of such a man, if the day is to begin well it must begin the night before. The mood in which we rise in the morning depends a good deal upon the circumstances in which we lay down. It is an excellent plan to *note* on a piece of paper and to lay on

your desk at night, what you propose to do and what, if God spares you, you shall do next day. In this, do not pose to yourself, putting down an amount of work which you are almost sure not to overtake. Better plan a programme which you can rather easily carry out: in which case you will have the right to your leisure. But whatever you say you *will* do, see to it that you indeed do. Interruptions, I know, you will have. But if you are an honestly busy man, it comes to be known that there are hours in which you must not be disturbed. In any case keep a credit and debit account of your time: and if you have missed an hour on a Tuesday morning, get up an hour earlier on Wednesday.

I beseech you young men to believe that an advice of this kind is not a trifling one. Most men break down

over a point of honour as delicate, as ridiculous if you like, as just that.

It is perhaps too much—and yet if one can manage to do this for a day or two on end, it becomes quite easy, so easy indeed that one wants to continue—but it may seem too much to ask you not to read the morning-paper until the afternoon. But the morning-paper accounts for many a man. My own plan is, *never to sit down* with the newspaper. I read it standing. Now one tires standing. When I feel that I want to sit down, I don't. Or rather, I fold up the newspaper and sit down at my desk.

The word 'desk' suggests 'writing.' Let me say something about that. A man should write out to the last syllable on any subject on which he has decided to speak. He may not utter a single

word of what he has written; but having *written*, he has given proof to himself that he has put his mind to the matter and to the matter not as a general one merely, but to it in its details and implications. A man with a ready tongue and a natural warmth of temperament may suppose, after one hard or even casual look at the subject, that he can manage. 'Oh yes,' he may say, 'I see my way.' That is why, as I said at the outset, born preachers for the most part come to nothing. If this man persists there is a danger of his becoming even tedious. But my grievance against such men is that they do not make of themselves anything like what with painstaking was possible. And more, in all manner of delicate and unseen ways, they fail to contribute to the production of spirit, of tension, of power. They become non-

conductors between one generation and another and break the apostolical succession. I am perfectly sure that the religious life of Scotland in days not very remote from our own has suffered to such a degree that it may be restored only *after* a time of fundamental anxiety for the Church—I am perfectly sure, I say, that the religious life of Scotland, in days not very remote from our own, suffered incalculably from the dominance of men who were accepted for a full generation as notoriously born preachers. They presumed upon their pulpit gifts. Masses of people waited upon their ministry; but, so far as I can perceive, they were apt rather to offend the spiritual intelligence of finer minds in those days who felt that no really able man could be so cocksure and triumphant as they appeared to be twice each Sunday. Frederick Denison Maurice

spent a week-end in Edinburgh some sixty years ago, and heard one and another of the *men*. He wrote to a friend—to Charles Kingsley it may have been—that it was a very disappointing experience, and that particularly about Dr. So-and-so there was an immense amount of humbug. Now Frederick Denison Maurice was not only a very good man : he was a man of very great ability. Indeed, I venture to say that for the crisis which is upon us in these days, Maurice provides material which will act as ballast to our fitful and puzzled souls, material such as is not being produced by any one of our contemporaries.

And so I say again, write ; write out everything. It is only respectful to the graveness of life. If you have a warm and leaping spirit, it will be none the worse later of having borne the yoke

in its youth. The Great Russians who know everything, who know so much about the soul of man indeed that our most subtle minds, minds like Meredith's even, seem heavy and half-awake—the Great Russians have a word for that early generosity of the soul which is apt to deceive a youth at the beginning of any artistic career—and preaching is a form of art—the Russians call it 'calf-rapture': a sportiveness, that is to say, which, *in itself* and until it is consecrated and controlled and harnessed to some task which shall take all it can give and more, is of no more worth than the mood which takes hold of a calf, disposing it to kick up its heels and lower its head and agitate itself to no apparent purpose. I have seen with my own eyes a calf behave in such a way, and near-by a staid cow with some experience of the world

looking on, as though she were saying, 'You wait!'

In saying these things I am not wishing to say anything to depress any man's native force. On the very contrary. I say these things so that a man who has a native gift may not lose it, as he certainly will lose it, in over-indulgence and abandonment and pride. For a natural gift, of the kind that I am thinking of, is a thing which stays by us later on, only if we have controlled it and made of it a gift from God. For I take it to be true that a gift of nature becomes the Gift of God only when we give it back to Him. And I am wanting the natural force and idiosyncrasy of men in the pulpit to survive the wear of life and the shocks of contradiction.

There is a story of two members of a church coming from public worship on the day when the new minister began

his ministry. 'And how did you like him?' asked the one, uttering words which if they were to be taken at their face value would mean that, so far as that man was concerned, the authority of the ministry had passed away. 'Oh, well enough,' replied the other, but with an obvious reservation. 'I don't think ye liked him.' 'Oh,' said the other, 'we 'll ha'e to get him into oor ain way.' That is the yawning abyss that lies in front of us all.

But to resume. There is a fine saying of S. Francis de Sales, 'Soyez douce à toi' —deal gently with yourself. I would go further and say that it is not a bad thing now and then to deal humorously with oneself. What is in my mind at the moment has to do with a man who sits down to his desk to write.

If he is wise, he will soon have learned what are the particular odds and ends

which seem to dispose him to write—the size of the paper, whether he shall use a pen or a pencil, whether the light of the room had better be shaded and so forth. For myself, I find it rather encourages what I am in the habit of calling my mind, if I present myself to it in the morning with a pad of paper *of a small size.* A very large page with not a word written on it is a disheartening thing. But if a man is wise, he will have observed these things and will not consider it beneath him to humour himself. Everything being now in order —the paper right, a half-dozen pencils sharpened and eager-looking—he sits down. Probably he proceeds to rack his brains for a striking opening. That is a mistake. Your best things will come later on when your brain has been warmed up. You may come to what would stand well as your first word

only when you have quite finished: in which case, as in all the great Psalms, you may very properly put your last word first, and give the conclusion of the whole matter at the outset. I am quite sure that it is this striving for an arresting first sentence which brings on that silence and paralysis of the intelligence, amounting after an hour or two's stagnation to sheer imbecility, which every writer knows so well. And if this be the explanation, we deserve the penalty: it may be the rebuke of the spirit to our pride. We are wanting, however delicately, to show off; and our good providence will be no party to it. I advise you therefore to begin as simply and poorly as you must; for if you really have something to say, you will find your way to appropriate language later on; and afterwards of course you can cut off the head of the

thing. But don't breathe this *arrière pensée* to yourself until you are well under way, for even the meanest thing that lives does not like to know that it is going to be decapitated.

In the early days, it helps us in our writing and takes us into a natural way of expressing ourselves if we write *in pencil*, saying to ourselves all the time that this is not the final form in which we mean to speak : that we shall make another copy in which words will be improved and irrelevancies and banalities cut out. For it excites our critical faculty unduly, and at a stage when it has indeed nothing to work upon, for so far we have not written anything, if we begin to write knowing that the very words which we are about to put down are going to stand. I am sure by this method we shall do something to escape that horrid sense of vacuity which

often overtakes us when, with the best intention in the world and thinking that we were charged to the finger-tips with something to say, we find that we cannot write two words on end: that 'having done all, we stand.' For it is curious that at such a dry season we can often write ONE word: though as we look at it, poor thing, it seems so helpless and insignificant that we score it out. Many a time have I spent a morning scoring out a long series of isolated opening words.

Well now, it is just here that I recommend a certain humorous treatment of ourselves and of the occasion. S. Paul, who used the words 'having done all, we stand,' goes on immediately to say 'stand therefore.' It is a most necessary instruction. For when we find that 'having done all we stand,' we are apt to do anything but 'stand.'

We are apt after a while to give it up. Now that is the one thing you must not do. It is a thing you will be tempted to do, tempted with a pressure and subtlety just short of intolerable. But if you sit faithfully to the end I can promise you, yes 'the crown of life,' a reward of intellectual liveliness and resource. But, I say, you will be fiercely assailed. After an hour or so of this silence in which you must never let yourself off the strain, holding your pencil-point to the paper as though you were saying to this presence with whom you are wrestling, 'When you are ready, I am ready'—after an hour or so of this, you will be tempted to push your paper aside, saying, 'It 's no use.' And you may go on to say, 'I 'm not in the mood, I must wait till the Spirit moves me,' though what I declare is that there and then the Spirit is moving you—to sit

still and hold on. Or there may start up into your mind, 'mens sana in corpore sano,' which so comforts you at the moment that you declare that it is an inspiration from a region deeper than reason; and indeed it is, if by *deeper* than reason you mean *lower*. I say, hold on, sit still, keep it up; 'and all that night the darkness deepened, from which I knew there would be born a star.' You are now in the very thick of what S. Paul calls the good fight of faith. You are in the last ditch indeed; but in the spiritual world you are never really wrestling until you are in the last ditch, and it is all or nothing. If you promised yourself you should write for three hours, and if so far you have written nothing, nevertheless you are not defeated if you persist in sitting on for those three hours with your soul held at the angle of eagerness and

entreaty. If such language were permitted to one in my position, I should WAGER that once the report has reached those lower depths of your personality that you are going to keep up the fight for the appointed time, before that time elapses you will have a deputation from the enemy to negotiate terms. Even then I would have you keep up your head and not relent too easily. For the fact is you are creating a precedent and are helping to decide whether in your case you are ever to gain the mastery over your pen, the power, that is to say, to summon your brain to write upon a matter to which you have given consideration, and upon which you have honourably prepared yourself to speak. I would have you not even allow yourself to suppose that, though the flood has been delayed, it will not come. I would have you behave as though it were

for you beyond all debate that, having put work into a matter and cleansed your soul of all unreality and self-seeking, words and vehicles of words will be provided in good time for the day when they are due.

But I cannot urge too insistently—having my own experience with its miseries and its grim conflicts and, now and then, thank God, its spacious and lucid hours—the absolute necessity, if life is not to be a mean torture to you, of forming habits so that when you put yourself physically and mentally *en pose*, the thing will occur.

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Having written your sermon, it is not for me to say whether you should preach it as you have it on paper. This also is a matter of conscience. The only justification for preaching without a manuscript is that it shall involve for

you *more* work than the other way. For the first ten years of your ministry at least, never speak *ex cathedra* unless you have worked in black and white through the subject to its last detail.

If you *will* speak without manuscript, do not memorise. Take a long walk on the Saturday (for I have been speaking exclusively of our main occasion as preachers) and think your way through the matter on which you have been writing. Do not try to recall a single *word*. Be anxious only that you have the ideas or idea. And, once again, if your heart is clean and simple and friendly, wishing to be of use to people, words not unworthy will come. If, speaking extemporaneously, you should suddenly come to a standstill, take hold of yourself, and keep your head. There 's nothing to be ashamed of. Once again, ' Soyez douce

à toi '—deal gently with yourself. If you are on proper terms with your people, it should be the most natural thing in the world for you to say—not posing, of course, or making a trick of it—' Ah, I have for the moment missed my point. Let me see now. Let me make clear to myself, if I may, what we had arrived at. We found that . . .' By that time I venture to promise you that you will have regained the thread; and, strange to say, *that* in the recollection of it by your people may even be the most touching and sincere portion of your sermon. For, quite justly, they feel that by their patience and sympathy they had helped you, and by your simpleness and friendliness in confessing yourself beaten for a moment, you let loose upon you a wave of real love. For ' how can man love but what he yearns to help ? '

For extemporaneous preaching there is one rule I would give. Write out what you propose shall be the *last* sentence and speak that sentence as you proposed you should. Do not allow the warmth of the moment to lead you into expanding it. If you would like to say more, don't. You may take it that *the more* which you would like to say, *the more* which has been suggested by what you have said has suggested itself to your hearers also. There is therefore no need for you to say it: they are saying it to themselves, which is far better.

How often has one seen a good man talking on and on, with his eyes beginning to turn to the back of his head, searching for a suitable sentence on which to sit down!

* * * *

Talking about rolling the eyes and so

forth, I rather think people to-day are not impressed but positively are rather *pained* by a preacher who rolls his eyes about and looks dreadful. I may be wrong but I believe we are entering a period when sound honest thinking, and real feeling—always with that tragic background of world-despair from which this faith of ours alone saves us—rather than reckless and frantic passion, or extravagance of speech and gesture, will be the medium in which truth will get home.

Certainly by this means, by maintaining a steady and eager spirit face to face with life as the channel through which you would fain convey your own faith and witness to God, and to Christ, and to the Holy Ghost, to the human necessity for worship, to the claim on your hearers for an ever-deepening responsibility—by this means certainly

you are more likely to-day to secure the assent, and at least to disarm the prejudice, of the abler and more dominant personalities of our time.

And that is a matter to which we have given too slight attention for almost an entire generation. We have far too little concentrated upon moving the dominant personalities of our time. I don't mean securing the benevolent attachment of rich people, unless they also have stooped to enter by the narrow gate.

But there is a danger in the kind of moral recklessness into which sentiment has already sunk, and to which the Church is invited to give itself, that we forget a point of view which certainly was present to the minds of the founders of the New Testament Church; a point of view which S. Augustine deliberately takes and defends himself for taking.

For whether it fits our particular theory of what is ultimately desirable, it is the fact that there are outstanding personalities in every age, men who by virtue of their interest in large bodies of their fellow-men, or by reason of their own sheer force and social value, do affect by their words or by their profession and attitude to final truth the life of a community. We Christian preachers and teachers ought to feel that we are failing in these days, not if we are failing to capture masses of people who on their own boastful witness are opposed to all serious views of life, but if we are failing to secure and to convince certain outstanding figures of our time in literature, in labour, in the region of exact knowledge, men who are already so far with us that they confess that life without some safeguard and interruption and relief Godwards

will grow sour, leading to bitterness, or will become too hard and mechanical to be endured. And what I was saying is that in the times which you are entering who are before me, it is something which you should keep more or less consciously before your own minds as an ideal—and it will have something of the happy influence of any fine ideal—that in all your words and statements and appeals there shall be a background of sound thinking, and sincere unforced imagination, and a certain saneness and inevitableness of appeal such as shall dispose able and serious and disquieted men—and all able and serious men to-day are disquieted—to consider anew the proposal of our Lord, the proposal as to Faith and as to Life which Jesus Christ made once in history, which it is the decisive function of His Church to recall to the mind and con-

science of men that it may not die, and that man may not finally fail.

* * * *

And now, my very kind hearers, my time is exhausted. Looking back across these hours, I feel as though I had said almost nothing of what was in my mind when, at first with reluctance but in the end with quite an eager spirit, I, a busy man, undertook this task. Certainly on my desk as I write there lie some hundreds of pages of notes, taken at odd times on many a journey, in rushing trains and on the ocean, with a view to these days and this occasion. But that is typical of a minister's work always, if preaching be his hearty and unanimous vocation: his tiny hill-tops of expression have at their source a travail and an underworld of effort, of suggestion, of boulders—sometimes with streaks of gold in them which nevertheless must

continue in darkness until the resurrection, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed—such as outsiders never suspect. For ours is an art, demanding in the long run everything of us. Our preaching comes to be our personal confession. And this all finer spirits can overhear. I should be ashamed to report to you that the life of a preacher is an easy one, or that it grows easier by custom. Our very task is that it shall not become easier. I protest, says S. Paul, to those awful Corinthians, I protest we die daily, nevertheless you live.

Perhaps it is in that most personal life of his, from the knowledge of which it is needful that even the people to whom he ministers and whom he greatly cares for should be excluded—for at the best outsiders can know only a little of

the secrets of the soul and, knowing that little, might misunderstand him on the whole or pity him or despise him, and in each case this would be the end of his power over them to rebuke them in the name of God—perhaps it is there, in that region where a man is alone with only God for companion, that the preacher becomes aware of the rigour and Christ-likeness of his task. For I take it to be beyond disputing that in order to preach, in order to be aware of God so habitually and joyfully that he can speak of Him and would like to speak of Him to his fellow-men, a preacher must be sensitive, and in the absence of a natural sensitiveness must by work, by pressure upon his original disposition, even become sensitive. But a sensitive man gives hostages to the world; so that it is within the power of almost any one, in the power of any fool, or of

any harsh and prosperous man to say something, or to do something—perhaps without knowing or intending an injury —which nevertheless can send any man who is fit to be the medium of unseen things, down into the darkness of a starless night. For sensitiveness is just the Latin for touchiness : and without sensitiveness, I repeat, no one can speak for God, or can deal firmly with those more delicate lights and shadows which in these days are almost all we have to steer by. For in these days it is most true that God guides us, as He promised, with His eye.

S. Paul in the Roman epistle dealing with the long history of his people, their dreams and the overthrow of their dreams, the stern and inexorable judgments which their God laid upon them so that they might know Him more

deeply, while the coarse empires of the world seemed to prosper, seemed certainly to escape all inner torment and to know nothing of this agony of the spirit; tossed about with retributions and fears and bitter questionings, which in turn exhaust themselves and sink into repentance and trembling and shame and faith—S. Paul, I say, suddenly interrupts himself and asks a question which, if you leave out God, is indeed a formidable and stunning question: 'What advantage then hath the Jew?'—what was the use, wherein lay the dignity, of their terrible election?—and he answers, giving the only answer, 'this, that *they* have the oracles of God'! Were things upon the surface the only things: were this present world all that is: then the call of the Spirit to a nation or to a human soul is a dark and tragic doom. S. Paul

saw this clearly and accepted it. For Christ's sake, he said, we are fools.

It often happens that this very sensitiveness of ours makes troubles for itself, troubles which have no real basis in the world of our circumstances even at the moment. For in the world of the soul there are often shadows when there are no clouds. Even so, let us be faithful to our mood at such a time and heal it, not disgracefully by some enforced frivolity of the spirit—in which a man shows that he is really not fit to be himself—but by falling back more firmly upon ourselves, and discussing with ourselves and in the presence of God this latest intangible sorrow. For the soul of a man by God's own gift and ordinance has the power to converse with itself, to reason with itself, even to compose itself to quietness as a mother might comfort her

delirious child. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God'—so some unnamed son of man sat apart and bound up his wound—a wound so deep that, outsiders observing him would have seen nothing, and yet so very deep that, had he not recalled and summoned his resource in God, he would have bled to death.

There is a depth in the understanding of such things to which perhaps only the man who is doomed to preach has access. That is his cross: it is also his crown. For as he rises from that new baptism unto death for Christ's sake, driven to test himself to the uttermost by some obscure sorrow or sense of defeat or the disappointment of some hope which perhaps he had too readily indulged—as he rises from the sacramental waters of such an ex-

perience, the servant and apostle of Christ comes upon his greatness. He enters upon a period which—for its wealth and resourcefulness and gaiety, for its superiority over poor ambitions and all the mean distresses of the soul —might be hailed as his Elizabethan period: when the sun shines with a precise reference to himself, and the grass is green. For he has just come back into this world from an interview, an interview in which Christ laid His hands, still bearing the bloody marks, upon the head of His troubled and, it may be, stupid but honest servant. For some days he sees all things, he knows all things, he believes all things, he hopes all things; he is ready to endure all things.

He has come out of his cave; and as he stands at the opening of it, looking no longer into the darkness but out

upon God's wonderful world, he perceives anew the majesty of his God-appointed life and hears the still small voice.

'And again he heard that voice, forced and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale: again he heard a man's voice—the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution and purpose, that shall be pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall and justice is done—again he heard it, and it was crying to him, as if from very very far, "All right."'

So Conrad describes Captain McWhirr in *Typhoon*. But long before we have

finished the quotation it is not Captain McWhirr we hear, and it is no crazy ship upon a tempestuous sea. The voice which we hear in the pauses of the storm is the voice of Jesus. And as for the ship on the bridge of which He stands, what is that but the weak yet indomitable human soul of which, in His love and greatness of spirit, He, Jesus, has taken charge, lest it should split upon any one disastrous experience, or go to rot—the crew having long since lost nerve and wisdom—in some senseless God-forsaken waste.

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